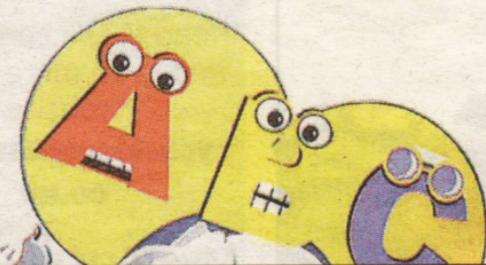


Speak an African language



Talking the talk: Alice Ako has started a language learning business

Mother's tongue

by JASON O'CONNELL

vthomas@london.newsquest.co.uk

A Mitcham woman was inspired by her son's determination to learn her native Ghanaian dialect and started a language learning business.

Ghanaian born Alice Ako, 40, of Vale Road, started CrossDialect after son Josh, 11, decided he wanted to learn Twi.

After an unsuccessful search for language learning aids, Alice decided to produce her own tape recordings to help Josh.

When family and friends started asking for the service Alice realised she had found a gap in the market.

She used her MBA degree and IT skills to create an interactive CD-ROM aimed at helping the young children of African immigrants to learn their parent's language.

CrossDialect is available in Twi, Ga and Ewe, and Yoruba is being developed.

Alice's entrepreneurial efforts were recently recognised when she won the Business Innovator prize, at the annual GPA Ghana@50 Awards.

"I didn't expect this level of interest, but I'm really passionate about African people

retaining their cultural heritage through their language," said Alice.

"I believe there is huge potential for the business which will contribute significantly to African families everywhere."

Writer and broadcaster Henry Bonsu believes that businesses like Alice's can play an important role within African communities both in the UK and internationally.

He said: "An interactive initiative such as this is an excellent way of promoting African pride as well as teaching young people that these local languages are an essential part of their heritage."

Professor Felix Konotey-Ahulu, an innovator in tonal linguistics, said: "Every African parent needs to take this unique opportunity that Alice Ako has provided to teach our people their mother tongue."

Alice plans to launch CrossDialect in America next month.

□ yourlocalguardian.co.uk