

Mother of autistic child develops 'universal language' app

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The "Talk Different" app uses 700 images, colours, icons and sounds to create messages based on alternative communication techniques she practised to interact with her daughter, whose autism severely limits her speech capacity

The French mother of an autistic child has created what is believed to be the world's first smartphone application allowing people speaking different languages—or those incapable of speech at all—to communicate together, French company Sogeti said Monday.

Marie Spitz developed the "Talk Different" app that uses 700 images, colours, icons and sounds to create messages based on alternative communication techniques she practised to interact with her daughter Pauline, whose autism severely limits her speech capacity.

The key to "Talk Different," Spitz says, is the ease and accessibility that allows lost travellers, the vocally- or hearing-impaired or other verbally isolated users to construct messages on smartphones or pads that virtually anyone else will understand.

It was introduced for purchase and downloading on Google Play and Apple Store in nine international languages on Monday by Sogeti, an affiliate of French computing service giant Capgemini.

Spitz says the 99 cent "Talk Different" app's picture book simplicity is an intentional contrast to the more complex and confounding tools she used in communicating with her daughter.

"The cost, required training and excessive specificity of aids for handicapped people make them difficult to access, and wind up isolating the handicapped," Spitz says.

"I have worked for over three years on this project with the goal that Talk Different would be accessible to all, for less than a euro on smartphones, while being very easy to use. The application requires no special training," she adds

After working around her daughter's speech disability for over a decade, Spitz founded her MPSLS software company to develop and perfect an application using her insights for medical, educational and tourism communication use.

Users select drawings and photos of various figures, situations, emotions

or ideas, and combine them with colour, sound, text and other evocative content to construct what become easily identifiable messages or questions.

"Talk Different makes everyday communication easier via an intuitive and fun application. With her exceptional vision and drive, Marie Spitz has invented a new way of communicating for people who may not speak the same language or who suffer from a range of disabilities," says Patrick Marquet, project manager at Sogeti.

With "Talk Different" now available for general public use, Spitz says she is developing a version of the app specifically for health workers and the handicapped.

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