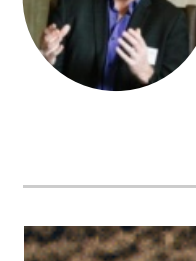
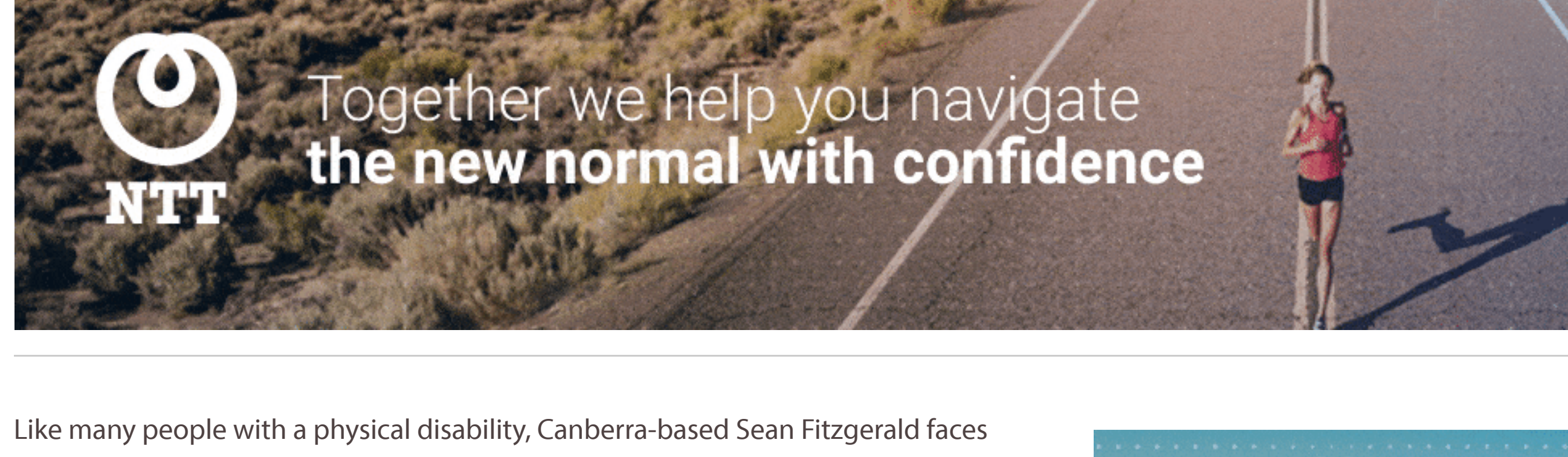


NEWS

New thinking required for national disability technology



By **Byron Connolly**
Editor, CIO | 25 JUNE 2015 1:33 AEST



Like many people with a physical disability, Canberra-based Sean Fitzgerald faces significant daily challenges. Paralysed from the shoulders down and forced to drive his wheelchair with his chin, Fitzgerald is one of almost 500,000 Australians who will benefit from the Federal Government's far-reaching National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

Fitzgerald broke his neck in 2000 while mountain biking in a remote area south of Darwin. At the time, he was an IT contractor working for United Nations peacekeeping forces in East Timor. After the accident, he was placed in intensive care for nine weeks, unable to move.

"I had to pretty quickly figure out what I was going to do to get myself out of this mess I was in. I remember being in intensive care looking up at the dots on the ceiling – and I was kept that way for about nine weeks. I knew of Dragon NaturallySpeaking [speech recognition software] and figured that would be my saviour and I could get back to work.

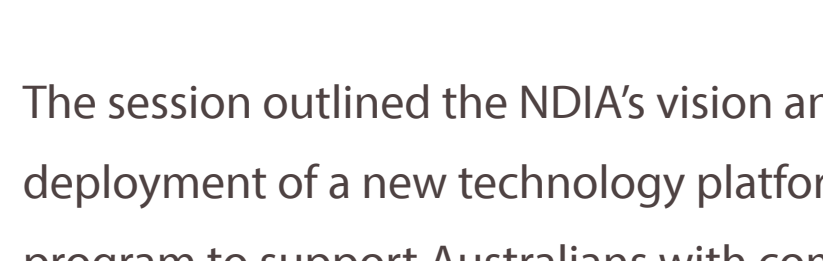
"Of course, when you get home, reality hits – you've got to deal with staff looking after you and the reality of competing in a contracting market means the guy in a wheelchair gets the last consideration of all."

These days, Fitzgerald runs C3 Solutions, an organisation that provides disability-friendly technology and training services. He hailed the NDIS program as the biggest social improvement project undertaken by the government in the last 30 years, which increases funding for people with a disability around Australia by more than two times.

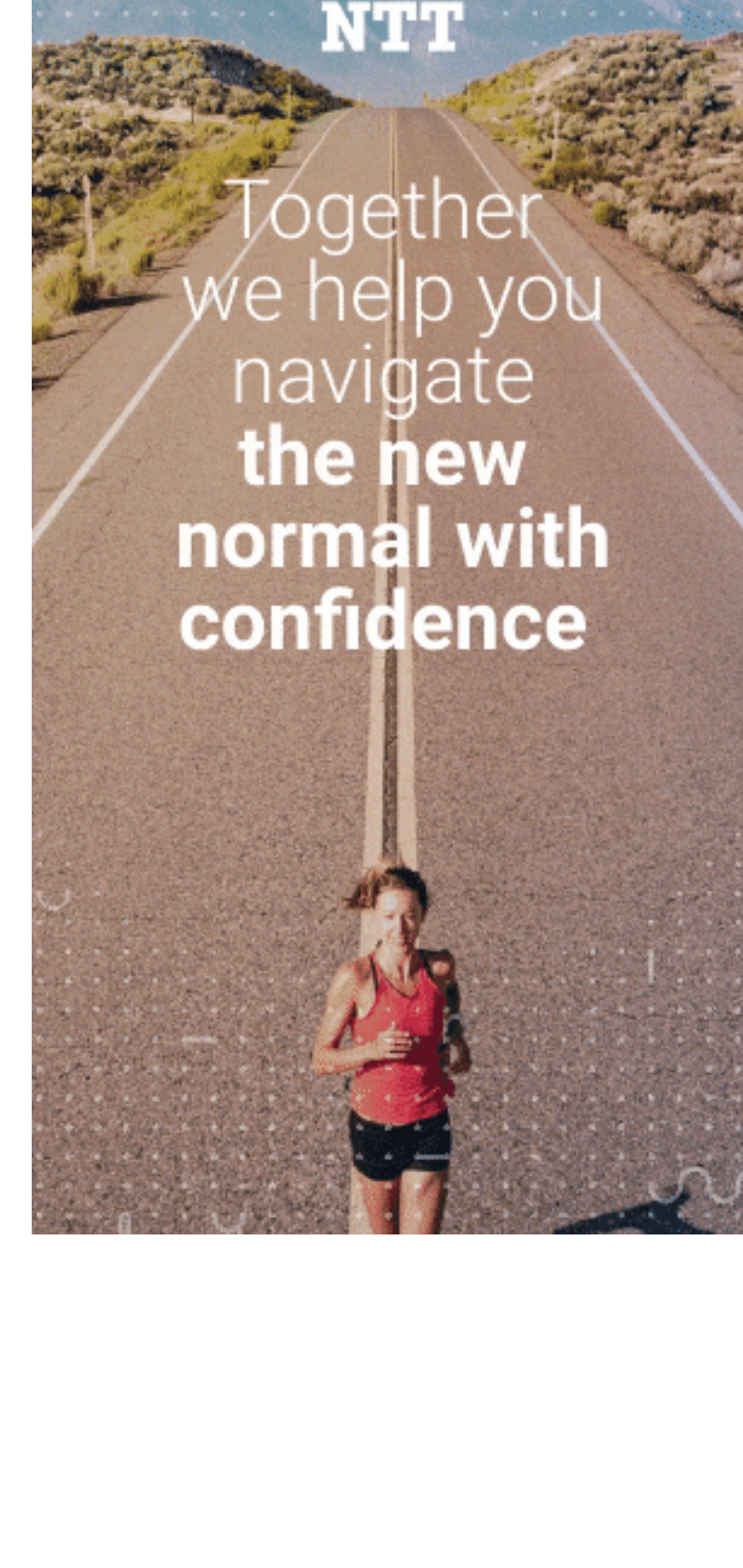
"If you look a little bit deeper into that of all the 500,000 eligible participants, it means that half of them weren't getting any funding at all," he told CIO.

"So how do get out of bed? If I haven't got people getting me out of bed, I don't get out of bed and if I haven't got someone sticking a spoon in my mouth, I don't eat either.

"The disability world is deep and diverse. I'm not your average disabled computer user by any stretch of the imagination," he said.



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Fitzgerald told his story at an information session held last week in Melbourne by the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), the organisation rolling out the NDIS.

The session outlined the NDIA's vision and strategy for the forthcoming deployment of a new technology platform that will be a vital part of the \$22 billion program to support Australians with complex physical and intellectual disabilities.

A 'once in a generation' reform
Marie Johnson is heading up the technology authority overseeing the rollout of the IT architecture and strategy by the NDIA. She compares the establishment of the NDIS to the creation of Medicare in the 1980s.

"These types of reforms are once in a generation," she said.
The government allocated \$143 million in its May budget to create and rollout technology that will replace an interim pilot system currently managed by the Department of Social Services (DSS).

Technology used during the pilot rollout has recently come under scrutiny as not being fit for purpose.
The new system will be rolled out over the next two years – starting with the transfer of core capabilities and actuarial data from the DSS to the Department of Human Services (DHS).

This will be followed by a phase to transform business processes using automation; and a final 'transcend' phase to further extend the operating model, Johnson told CIO.

"The DHS is doing the technology work – our role is in the architecture, the assurance and the strategy," Johnson said.
Breakthrough thinking is needed to deploy a 'fit for purpose' technology architecture that will eventually touch over 2 million citizens through various community support services when full coverage is achieved in 2019-20.

"This is not something that we have neatly thought out ahead of time," said Johnson. "We believe this system will help drive innovation right through this ecosystem of service providers."

The NDIS' insurance-based model is about providing people with disabilities with choice around the services they will require throughout their lifetimes and the use of technology and data will be highly significant, said Johnson.

"We will use an actuarial-based model where there is a very significant focus on longitudinal data and analytics. We have a chief actuary and there's a focus on analytics to understand lifetime costs and benefits and so forth. So it's a data-driven model that helps inform policy decisions as well as decisions made by participants," said Johnson.

Providing a positive 'participant experience' will be vital. Johnson said there is large percentage of NDIS participants who have some form of intellectual disability and the agency and IT providers need to think about how to best provide services for this group.

"Participants will need to be part of and involved in the design of those services. The way they engage with content is far different to what you and I and anybody else would usually expect. And so when we talk about accessibility, this takes what that means to a different level."

Although the agency will be utilising existing DHS capabilities, new technologies will need to be explored in areas such as user experience, said Johnson.

"In some areas, we know the capabilities of the core platform in terms of our case management, our ERP, the actuarial platform and analytics. Where it does start to take on a very exciting level of innovation is in the whole digital and user experience domain.

"Having someone engage with us across all our domains whether it's in the participant domain, face-to-face or using different apps, that's going to be quite different to what the usual experience will be [when dealing with other DHS and government services]. It's going to take service design to a different level," Johnson said.

'Gamifying' content – using computer game elements to help people navigate through services – may be an option, she said.
Daniel Newman, partner at Deloitte Australia, a partner on the project, said the NDIS system will not deliver a traditional user experience that utilises transactional, text-based portals that people have become used to seeing.

"This will be totally different. As a snapshot as to what this might look like – it will bring together the leading ideas and thoughts that are happening in social media and engagement platforms but use that in a social insurance context," he said.

Participants will be able to get online and choose providers they want to engage with and see which services have been provided to other people with similar needs in their local area, said Newman.

A complex service environment
Sean Fitzgerald is only one type of customer that technologists are going to have to make solutions for. People have a variety of needs and the challenge will be to make sure participants only have to tell their story once, he pointed out.

"A single mother with two intellectually-disabled kids who is on duty 24 hours a day is more than time poor. You can't occupy her time by [making her] deal with electronic paperwork," he said. "It's this level of customer that ICT contractors are going to have to deal with."

Suppliers will need to make sure the language is appropriate and they will need to engage with other organisations that specialise in these areas, particularly those who work with people with an intellectual disability, he said.
One of these organisations might be the ACT Disability, Aged and Carer Advocacy Service (ADACS), a not-for-profit aimed organisation that helps people with disabilities and their carers. Fitzgerald is a board member of ADACS.

"This is about making sure that we get the maximum number of NDIS participants to deal with their own affairs as possible," he said
Fitzgerald highlights that many people with disabilities have never been allowed to be responsible for their own finances and have been told not to expect the same everyday services that other people get access to.

"These are things that unless you are directly involved in the disability industry, you wouldn't know. So they [service providers] are really going to have to start thinking outside the square from a base level up," he said.
Fitzgerald said that technologists will need to talk to people with disabilities to understand their challenges to deliver the best environment for participants.

"As David Bowen [CEO of the NDIA] has made quite clear, for the scheme to be successful and financially viable, a good ICT system that enables people to deal with their own affairs is absolutely critical," he said.

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Byron Connolly is a highly experienced technology and business editor who leads the editorial strategy for CIO Australia.

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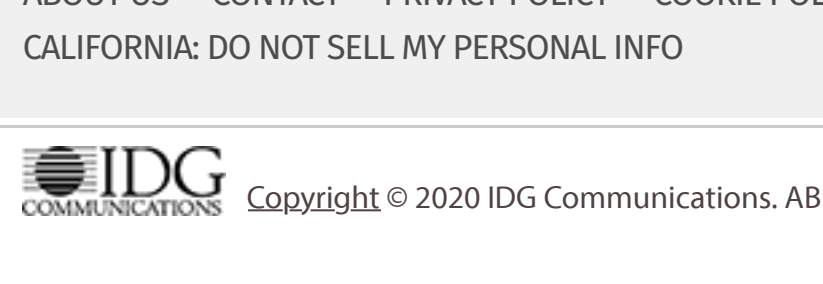
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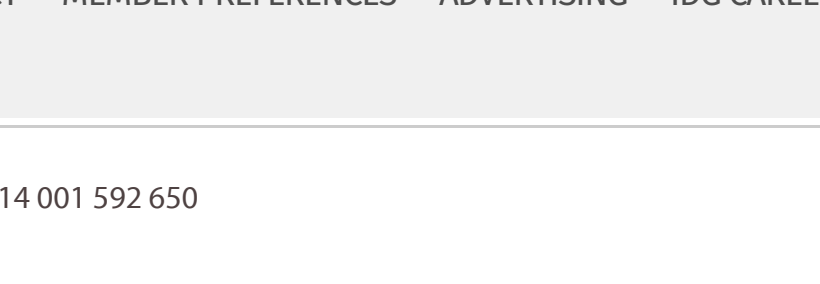
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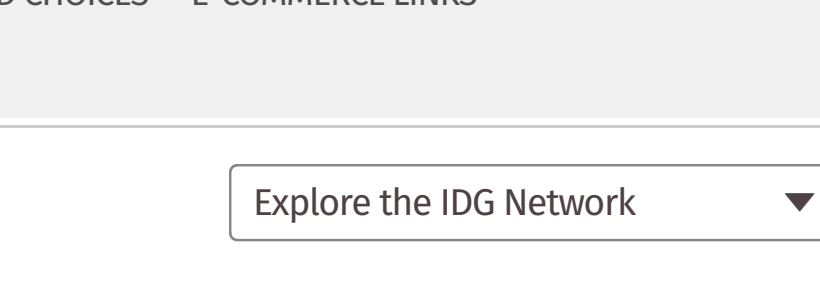
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