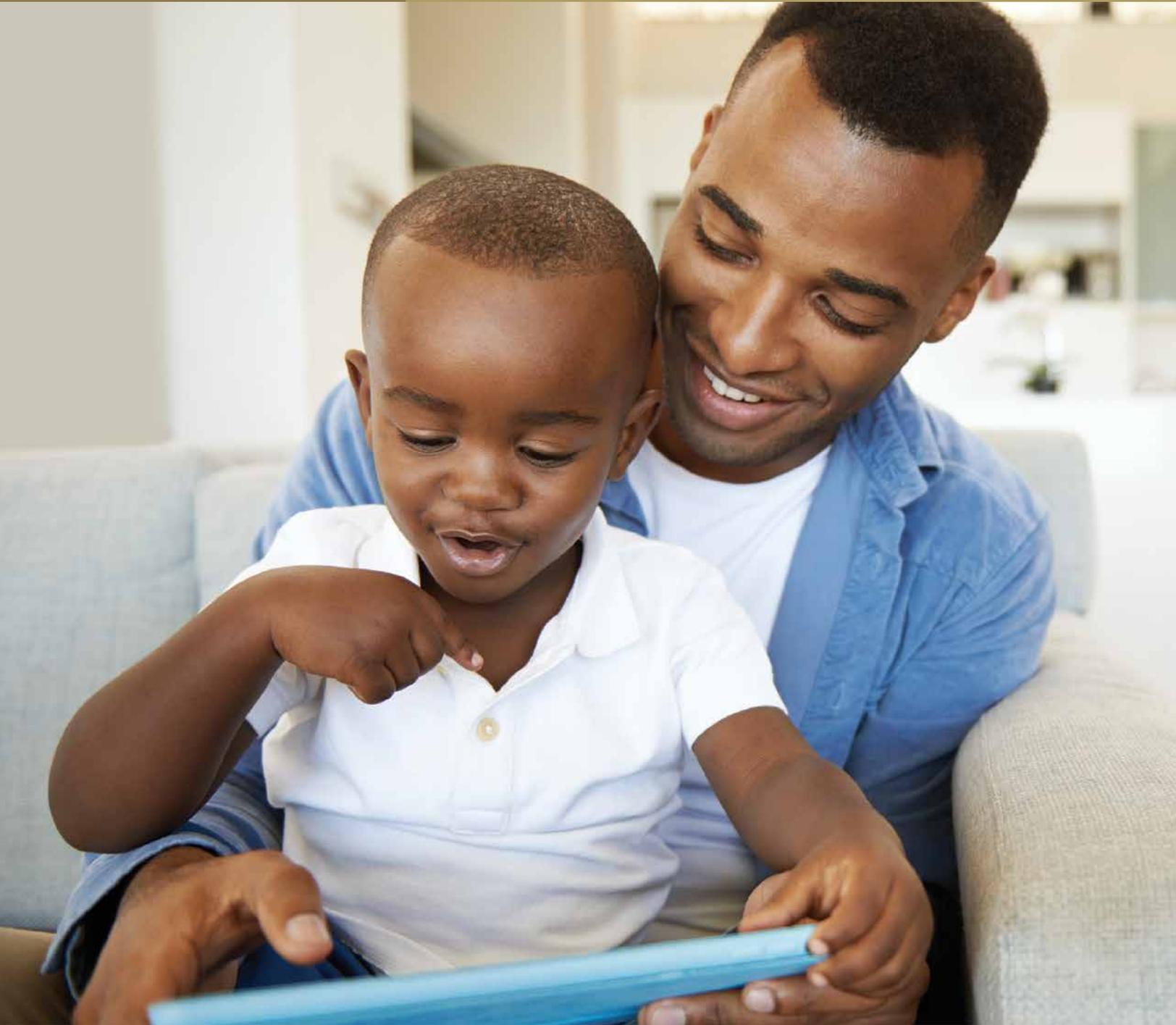


Forbes
INSIGHTS

DIGITIZING HUMAN SERVICES

FIELD NOTES AND FORECASTS FROM THE FRONT LINES
OF GOVERNMENT'S TECHNOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION



IN ASSOCIATION WITH:





FOREWORD

Technology is transforming the provision of human services.

- It may be driven by a policy directive from a mayor, governor or still more senior executive.
- The key driver is often financial: a sobering realization that tight government budgets are here to stay leads to the need to do more with less.
- No doubt rising expectations play a role, because as citizens experience greater ease and convenience in their broader commercial lives, they wonder why they cannot interact with government on similar terms.
- Or the focusing element could be the passionate desire among government workers and leaders to simply do more to help constituents, be they seniors, the homeless, at-risk children, the developmentally disabled or anyone similarly in need.

(Continued from page 21)



NEW YORK

CAMBA: How better data helps case workers prevent homelessness

CAMBA is an NFP based in Brooklyn, N.Y. From its beginnings in 1977, the group has grown to provide over 150 integrated services and programs in education, youth development, family support, health, housing and legal services.

Melissa Mowery is the director of CAMBA's HOMEBASE program, where "a primary focus is on the homeless: we do everything from [managing] drop-in centers and shelters to building affordable housing." One thing CAMBA has learned from its partnership with the City of New York is that housing the homeless is an expensive proposition. Consequently, a focus for CAMBA is "innovation in homelessness prevention," says Mowery. "If we can keep people from becoming homeless in the first place, that's not only better for that person or family—no one wants to have to go to a shelter—that's less costly for everyone."

Today CAMBA is learning that with the more effective use of data, the organization can better identify those at relatively higher risk of becoming homeless and simultaneously direct resources to where they can do the most good. A few years ago, Marybeth Shinn, a professor from Vanderbilt University, "came to us with some key risk factors," says Mowery. The single strongest predictor "is whether or not you've ever been in a shelter before." Once someone has been in a shelter, "they are significantly more likely to return."

But there are other risk factors as well: being a young, unwed or unaccompanied mother with children; being under the age of 28—or moving more than four times in a given 12 months. So, explains Mowery, "we look at data from a variety of sources to identify those at highest risk."

This and related data is entered into a proprietary tool that overlays information about potential CAMBA "clients" onto a Google map accessible by PC, laptop or smartphone. Field workers for CAMBA can now see concentrations of those at highest risk for homelessness. Various colored dots—red, orange or blue—represent those who have been to housing court or have been to a shelter. Click on a dot and the field worker can see details such as the composition of the family.



Today CAMBA is learning that with the more effective use of data, the organization can better identify those at relatively higher risk of becoming homeless and simultaneously direct resources to where they can do the most good.

CAMBA field workers can now prioritize their case work, seeking interaction with the greatest numbers of those at greatest risk. "They can knock on the door, send a flier, let them know that we understand they're having an issue and we're here to help," says Mowery. Field workers can also use what they see on their smartphone to adjust their day "on the fly" to take advantage of opportunities as they arise.

Today's technologies can also be used to expand the physical outreach. With funding from the Durst Family Foundation, CAMBA recently purchased an RV—well-outfitted with mobile technologies including computers. The RV can be driven to targeted outreach neighborhoods, parked directly in front of a building where at-risk tenants reside, providing eviction prevention services literally on doorsteps. Ultimately, says Mowery, "technology is enabling us to target our outreach more effectively, improving the chances we can prevent someone from becoming homeless."

Next up, tearing down walls to enable closer collaboration and improved citizen outcomes.