CASE IQ CASE STUDY

OCA
Office of the Child Advocate

Michigan Office of the Child Advocate Streamlines Case Management and Improves Compliance Using Case IQ

Case IQ

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The State of Michigan Office of the Child Advocate helps to protect and improve the lives of children by investigating complaints and child deaths related to the state's child welfare system and by recommending changes to law, policy, and practice. They needed a better case management system to fulfil their mission to bring greater accountability to Michigan's child welfare system. Adopting Case IQ case management on Microsoft Azure for Government has improved efficiency, productivity, and security, empowering the agency to better manage cases from beginning to end.

The State of Michigan Office of Child Advocate (OCA) advocates for families and children by investigating complaints about the Michigan child welfare system, providing helpful resources to citizens, and recommending improvements to the governor, Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, and legislature. "The child welfare system can be complex and confusing, involving many different laws, regulations, and agencies," says Ryan Speidel, Michigan's Child Advocate and Director of the OCA. "Our office was created to help children by providing one place for residents to go when they have complaints or need information, and to continuously improve child welfare systems in the state of Michigan." The team also investigates the deaths of minors who had contact with the system at any point in their lives. "It's our duty to find out if a death happened because an agency didn't adhere to the law so we can make meaningful recommendations to improve the system," notes Speidel.

The OCA does all this with a team of just 22 people, fielding around 1,000 complaints each year, along with thousands of information requests. A team of six public intake and education analysts handles initial phone and web inquiries, acting on urgent matters and conducting preliminary investigations where needed. If a full investigation is called for, one of the team's eight investigators takes over.

STRIVING TO OVERCOME PRODUCTIVITY AND SECURITY CONCERNS

Dynamic workdays at the OCA include interviewing families and agencies, responding to requests for information, engaging with state executives and legislators, and reviewing case-related documents. The team's productivity and ability to collaborate directly affects the lives of vulnerable children. Additionally, the sensitivity of its work requires strong data security and privacy protection. The OCA must comply with rigorous security and privacy regulations, such as the Federal Risk and Authorization Management Program (FedRAMP) and Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS).

Until 2020, the team had to get by using a case management system that was far from ideal. Built on a traditional customer relationship management (CRM) platform, it made data entry difficult, lacked auditability and role-based security, and was inflexible and difficult to manage. "The CRM just wasn't adequate for our needs," says Speidel. "It really wasn't designed for capturing the kinds of detailed information typical of our work. For example, the text fields were very small, making it difficult to enter, view, and edit data. There were a lot of fields we never used that could not be removed. When you are managing a large caseload, those user experience issues really add up."

The OCA needed to improve the reliability and auditability of its data and protect against insider threats. For example, the old system did not allow for role-based controls, meaning that intake professionals and investigators could edit each other's work. Without an audit trail, such actions could not easily be discovered.

The agency also spent too much time manually creating reports for department leaders, and team members couldn't edit reports once finalized. "When an autopsy report or death certificate was released, we couldn't go back and update the case, resulting in our annual report showing indeterminate as the cause of death in a high proportion of cases." That meant less information available to decision makers to improve the system.

Additionally, the OCA wanted to improve the security and efficiency of web-based complaint submissions, which were sent to a non-secure mailbox and entered into the CRM manually.

Speidel had some idea of the capabilities he needed as he explored new case management solutions. "We wanted an off-the-shelf system that was very user-friendly but could also be configured to our needs," he says. He found both in Case IQ, a Microsoft partner whose purpose-built case management system runs in Microsoft Azure for US Government.

DISCOVERING THE ADVANTAGE OF CLOUD-BASED CASE MANAGEMENT

Case IQ is a comprehensive case management platform that streamlines investigative processes by centralizing case information, increasing productivity, and supporting secure collaboration. Structured workflows simplify tracking, managing, and reporting for complaints or referrals. As a configurable, no-code solution, it enables tailoring of workflows, fields, forms, and access controls to the OCA's needs. "It was a very cost-effective way for us to get a customized complaint management system," says Speidel.

To use Case IQ, the OCA needed authority to operate from the Michigan Department of Management and Budget (DMB), which hosted the previous CRM solution in its own datacenters. The fact that Case IQ ran on Azure for US Government greatly simplified the procurement process. "Case IQ opened the conversation with compliance and security, which gave me confidence right from the start," says Speidel. "Their confidence in the compliance capabilities of the Azure cloud made me very comfortable to move forward."

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After choosing Case IQ, the configuration process began in October of 2019 and lasted until March of 2020. After a comprehensive round of user testing, the solution went live in June of 2020 — during a time when the team was working remotely due to COVID-19. "Implementing the solution was easy because it just works," Speidel says. "The user interface is simple and intuitive, and everyone picked it up right away."

The system has shown consistent reliability and uptime, and the OCA enjoys responsive support from the Case IQ technical team. "With our previous hosted solution, the system would sometimes be unavailable, and we wouldn't know why or when it would be restored. The system has been very stable, and we haven't experienced long outages, which means our team can stay focused on casework," says Speidel.

Another advantage of using the Case IQ system the OCA is experiencing is trainability. The OCA recently added the Juvenile Justice system to their workload and added new resources to their team. The OCA has found training new staff in the Case IQ system is simplified by the user-friendly interface, reducing the total time it takes to onboard staff.

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CAPTURING DATA AND AUTOMATING PROCESSES TO DRIVE MORE EFFECTIVE INVESTIGATIONS

The solution helps the entire team work more efficiently so it can have a greater positive impact on the lives of Michigan's kids. For one thing, it supports comprehensive data capture, improving the efficiency and effectiveness of investigations. Additionally, the agency's director now has full visibility into each case, including review status and other project milestones. "We can capture a slew of data we didn't have before," notes Speidel. "The interface is simple and allows team members to capture information in their own words."

Automation also plays a role. "Previously, we were producing reports by reading and highlighting individual documents and then compiling information into PowerPoint presentations," says Speidel. "Now we can create more comprehensive reports with a few clicks." To-do lists and reminders help everyone stay on top of their tasks. The system also automatically handles basic inquiries so staff can focus on investigations.

As a result, Speidel and his team have been able to handle a growing caseload without compromising the thoroughness of the information gathered and compiled into their reports. Since implementation, the OCA has been able to reduce the average number of days needed to complete a full investigation, averaging 65 completed per year.

ENHANCING DATA INTEGRITY

Another benefit comes from built-in workflows, which streamline reviews and approvals and ensure proper oversight. By capturing user actions throughout the process, Case IQ supports the integrity and auditability of data. "Case IQ helps us maintain data integrity within our system across the entire investigation and review process," says Speidel. "For example, previously there was no area for the ombudsman to document their review within the case file. Now, it's all in one place."

The OCA also upgraded its public-facing complaint from using Case IQ. The old, non-secured web form is gone, replaced by a new tool that imports resident feedback directly into the case management system. The information is secured inside of Case IQ automatically, without a staff member having to manually reenter it.

The OCA uses role-based access capabilities in Case IQ to prevent unauthorized changes. "We can lock down the front end based on role, so the preliminary investigation can't be edited by the analyst and vice versa," says Speidel. "It's one more way of ensuring data integrity."

The OCA team is also better equipped to meet regulatory compliance requirements by using Case IQ, which features built-in FedRAMP and CJIS compliance functionality. "Because Case IQ is hosted on Azure for US Government and built according to high security standards, we know we can meet the strict compliance requirements we are subject to," says Speidel.

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ADVANCED ANALYTICS ARE HELPING THE OCA DELIVER GREATER VALUE

One of the biggest areas of improvement that the OCA has seen since implementing Case IQ has been the way it has been able to leverage the data analytics capabilities that come with Case IQ.

Case IQ allows the OCA to collect data points such as physical location of subject children, and the emerging issues they are facing. Amie Miller joined the OCA team in 2024 as their Project Support Administrator, helping with the reporting and technical aspects of the Case IQ system for the OCA. "Having the availability of analytics within Case IQ, allows us to utilize the data we're collecting during investigations for other of the OCA operations. Public education is important to what we do, and being able to track emerging issues allows us to prepare targeted communications." says Amie.

In addition to improving their capability to perform public education, the OCA uses the analytics options to identify cases that meet specific criteria to identify systemic issues. Information from investigations is stored in one place, the reporting tool allows them to look at impacts statewide, and decisions can be made on where investigation efforts would add the most value overall.

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Amie Miller
Project Support Administrator

ADVOCATING FOR CHILDREN, SUPPORTED BY THE RIGHT TOOLS

The value of the Case IQ all comes down to helping the OCA help kids. With better data, efficient productivity, improved collaboration, and a reliable, secure-by-design platform, each specialist in the OCA is empowered to contribute their best on behalf of Michigan's most vulnerable children. "We lean into the idea that we are advocates," notes Speidel. "Rather than sitting on our hands waiting for things to go wrong, we empower our team to make a positive impact by acting immediately wherever possible. Case IQ is helping us do that every day."

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