

Dana Giroux

I am the mother of three severely developmentally delayed adults who need help with everything from feeding to changing and dressing. I had two caregivers to help. Now, I just have one. One caregiver took a look at this trainwreck that PPL represented and said no way. She left in January.

And it was a mess. We were not with any of the agencies that would allow us to transition to PPL more easily. So we switched to Horizon. Due to the way that transpired, we lost 3 weeks of pay to make that switch. Then, we had to switch to PPL, but the problem there was that no one was answering the phones at all. In fact, we couldn't even get on the website most days. The amount of traffic would shut down any additional people trying to use the platform. I had to work nights to try to figure out the system. PPL's system is not user-friendly.

By not user-friendly, I mean this. There are buttons at the top that indicate various things, but going from being a consumer to having to manage an HR system is not easy. I didn't know what I was looking at. I knew we needed to upload documents, but I wasn't sure what format they needed to be in. Would the system take jpeg or pdf? If I uploaded the documents and nothing happened within a few days, would have to change the format and upload again? There was no ongoing discourse to tell the user how close they might be to meeting requirements. A user-friendly system might be transparent about what the system would need and whether the input had passed whatever checks. The system was unresponsive, so I had to keep trying different things to see if it would let me pass through to getting the personal aides approved. And I had to collect personal information like bank account numbers, social security numbers, driver's license photos, etc. It worked out because I was hiring a family member. It has not worked out when trying to hire someone outside the family who doesn't and shouldn't trust me with all their critical information. Even so, it took several weeks to get the aides registered. A family friend offered. We added her to the PPL site for her to try to load her information. She said it was uselessly complicated. PPL called her six weeks later to find out what she needed help with. She had already found a job.

The problem here is that when we lose aides, we cannot get new ones. Every aide that leaves is a death knell. I have had to quit my day job to become an aide because I have no other option. I am working tirelessly, dreaming of the day I can go back to teaching college again because this is hard work. But under the circumstances, I am not optimistic. The benefit of working with a smaller agency was that you could deal with one HR person. If you told them that you needed calls in the afternoon, they respected that. With PPL, you would get a different person each time, and there is no telling when they will call or whether the person calling is knowledgeable. I did get a PPL rep to talk to me once, but she was navigating that platform and asking me to help her!!!

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I have a background in computer programming and I did one stint of writing technical materials for Microsoft to guide software architects. When I say that the platform is too complicated for the average person to make sense of, I know what I am talking about. The goal here seems to be to get rid of the caregivers and thereby their disabled clients.