

12 March 2015

PRESS RELEASE

Guide dog owner settles case with Bangor restaurant

A blind man from Newtownards who was turned away from a restaurant in Bangor because he was with his guide dog has welcomed the settlement of a case he brought with the support of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

James Cosgrove (51) and his dog Imogen were accompanied by a sighted friend when they went to the Bangla Indian Restaurant in Bangor. A waiter told them that no dogs were allowed in the restaurant. Mr Cosgrove's friend explained that the dog was a guide dog, not a pet, and that not to allow them in because of the dog was unlawful discrimination. The waiter checked with management, who confirmed that either they could tie the dog up outside or order a carry out. James was upset and embarrassed by the whole incident and left.



James Cosgrove with Imogen

"I go everywhere with Imogen," he explains. "On the day this happened, I felt terrible being denied admission in front of other people. Even though my friend explained what the law is, it made no difference. Because I was able to take my case with the help of the Equality Commission, the owner of the restaurant has apologised and agreed to look at changes to the restaurant's policies so that this doesn't happen to someone else, and that's really what I want."

The owner of the Bangla Restaurant agreed to pay James £1,250 plus legal costs, apologised unreservedly to him and undertook to liaise with the Equality Commission to ensure that the restaurant's policies, practices and procedures conform with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and the Disability Code of Practice.

Mary Kitson, senior legal officer with the Equality Commission, said: "This is a straightforward case in which lack of knowledge of the law led to unlawful discrimination taking place. Disability discrimination is, sadly, more common than people might think – our legal team gets more calls every year about disability discrimination than any other

equality ground. The Bangla restaurant representatives will be meeting with our Advice and Compliance staff, who will help them make sure that their policies are compliant with the law and give them guidance on how to make their business more welcoming to people with disabilities.”

Andrew Murdock, Policy and Engagement Manager, Guide Dogs NI, commented: "Guide dog owners continue to face difficulties in accessing every day services and facilities that the rest of us take for granted. Looking forward to an evening out, only to be turned away at the door because your guide dog is not welcome, is the humiliating experience that many guide dog owners like Jim face all too often. The law is clear on this and we welcome this settlement and hope it will raise awareness of this issue."