

15 December 2016

PRESS RELEASE

Student settles case against Applegreen alleging sexual harassment for £6000

Jodie Jones, a student who had been employed part-time by Applegreen, has recently settled a sexual harassment case against her former employer for £6000. The case, which was assisted by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, was settled without admission of liability.

Jodie Jones alleged that a male co-worker had made offensive and sexually explicit comments to her while she was working. She further claimed that she reported the incidents to her manager immediately and had hoped that they would be dealt with appropriately.

Jodie Jones said: "I started working in Applegreen when I was 17; I just wanted to earn some money whilst I was studying. I was really pleased to get the job and delighted that it worked around my college timetable. Things were going well until a male colleague made sexual comments to me that made me feel really uncomfortable and embarrassed. Later during the same shift he made more comments and I was humiliated by what he said. I reported both the incidents to my manager and she replied all she could do was apologise."

"I discovered my complaints hadn't been passed on to the store director and I told my parents what had happened. They were extremely concerned and they accompanied me to the shop the following day. My family and I felt that my manager was not dealing appropriately with the serious issues I had raised. I felt I had no option but to quit my job." Jodie Jones concluded.

Anne McKernan, Director of Legal, Equality Commission said: "Only a few months ago we publicised a number of other cases regarding young women who alleged sexual harassment in the workplace in Northern Ireland. It is most disappointing that here we have another very similar experience of a young woman who is simply trying to earn some money to help pay her way through college, who felt harassed within the workplace and that her employer appeared unprepared to deal with the harassment when the situation arose.

“It is shocking that young women continue to feel they are being sexually harassed in the workplace in 2016. This is not acceptable behaviour and must be eradicated.

I cannot say it strongly enough, it is imperative that when complaints relating to this type of behaviour are reported, that they are investigated and dealt with immediately and appropriate action taken. Employers have to ensure that they have policies to deal with offensive behaviour, that they make sure all their staff are made aware of them and of the fact that they will be enforced. They cannot wait until an issue arises before considering how they might deal with it.

Anne McKernan concluded: “The Equality Commission provides free training and confidential advice to employers on bullying and harassment. I would urge all employers to use the resources we have on offer so that they are fully prepared to address correctly any allegations that may arise within their workforce of sexual harassment.”

Without admission of liability, the Company has apologised to Ms Jones and acknowledged and expressed regret for the injury to feelings, hurt and distress experienced by her. It also reaffirmed its commitment to ensuring that staff are free to work in an environment in which they are protected and safeguarded from sexual harassment. It has agreed to liaise with the Equality Commission to review its equal opportunities policies and practices, and to consider and implement reasonable recommendations to ensure that all staff are fully acquainted with and trained in policies to prevent harassment.

ENDS

Note for Editor

- Jodie Jones was referred to the Equality Commission by Donnelly and Wall Solicitors.