DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION CASE STUDY

A young woman suffered disability discrimination when she was turned away from a beauty clinic because she was accompanied by her guide dog.

The woman was 28-years old when the incident occurred. She was born with a progressive condition which limited her eyesight and had been registered blind for over 15 years. Her guide dog accompanied her everywhere.

In 2015, she attended a beauty clinic in Glasgow having booked to receive a facial treatment. Arriving with her guide dog, she was told by reception staff that the dog would not be allowed into the treatment room and would need to wait outside. Various reasons were given for this, including the room being too small.

Although reluctant to leave her guide dog, she undertook to call a friend who could sit with the dog outside the room while she had the treatment. The reception staff told her she was not allowed to make the call from the premises and would need to leave the clinic to do so. The woman left the clinic distressed and humiliated.

The Royal National Institute of Blind People subsequently contacted the clinic seeking an apology for the treatment which the woman suffered and offering training on disability discrimination. The management of the clinic denied any wrong-doing and declined to give an apology. They declined to respond to any further correspondence, including letters threatening court proceedings.

Ultimately, the woman raised a small claim against the clinic seeking a monetary award in respect of injury to feelings. The director of the clinic defended the action, offering a number of arguments including the claim that the woman failed to present the correct voucher on arrival at the clinic. At a proof hearing in late 2016, the Sheriff dealing with the matter roundly dismissed these arguments and awarded the woman the sum of £950 (plus court expenses) for injury to feelings.

For more information on when discrimination claims can be made see our Equality Act 2010 - Handbook for Advisers