

Press Release: 'Centre for Personal Growth' pays out to sacked worker in Employment Tribunal settlement.

Richard Clare, 40, from Sheffield, has accepted a financial payment from his ex-employer, the Unstone Grange Trust, in settlement of his claim against them for unfair dismissal and reinstatement through Sheffield Employment Tribunals Service. The Trust has also agreed to provide Mr Clare with a fair and factual reference and to provide Mr Clare's mortgage insurance company with the information they need to process his claim for cover.

Mr Clare worked as a volunteer Co-ordinator for the "Organic Gardening for Health" project at Unstone Grange, providing occupational therapy in the gardens, since 2001. In addition, he began teaching courses in Organic growing for the project in January 2004.

Mr Clare is currently studying for a P.G.C.E. teaching qualification at Sheffield Hallam University and wants to deliver more courses about Organic food.



I worked at Unstone Grange for ten years in total, 6 as a volunteer and 4 as a paid worker.

The manager repeatedly used formal warnings with the threat of dismissal as a first resort, although none of these were found to have any substance when challenged. I believe she warned me because I was critical of her managerial and organisational performance, and also because I disapproved of the Manager and Chair of the Charity being co-habiting life-partners.

I had a clean work record and was told that no-one doubted my professional abilities.

Last May, after a regular monthly team meeting, I was issued with another warning. On appeal, in August, a co-worker whose views had been misrepresented by the manager in support of the warning, denied that he had made a complaint about me. Despite this evidence to the contrary, a committee of 3 trustees upheld the manager's decision. When I continued to plead my innocence, I was told that I should sign a gagging order, committing me to silence on the subject, or I would be suspended.

When I continued to teach the course I had just started, with the consent of all the students, at an alternative venue, I was informed that this was insubordination, but I could accept a referral to an Occupational Health Specialist as an alternative to dismissal. Three months later, after the Occupational Health Department at the Northern General refused to take the case, I was "summarily" dismissed.

At a final meeting on December 16th 2004, I had to demand my P45, which the employer had not issued. I also made a request for an explanation and evidence of serious allegations which had been made against me, but was only told that it was the manager's "professional judgement". I refused an appeal on 9th January 2005, because the employer had had evidence of my innocence and chosen to ignore it all along.

During this episode, two trustees and two caretakers left Unstone Grange. My job was advertised, but none of the 6 candidates were appointed.

I resorted to the Employment Tribunal Service because it was my only access to justice. Many thanks to Sheffield Law Centre.