

Alison Taylor

Alison Taylor is a former social worker who was sacked for blowing the whistle on child abuse in North Wales children's homes. As the manager of a home run by Gwynedd county council in the mid 1980s she had seen evidence of physical abuse and been told of appalling sexual and physical abuse by children transferred from other homes in both Gwynedd and neighbouring Clwyd. She raised the matter with her superiors, but when no action was taken she went to the police in 1986 with a series of allegations. The local authority responded by suspending her, claiming there had been a "breakdown in communications" between her and her colleagues. It twice offered her a financial settlement if she resigned, but she refused to accept the accompanying secrecy clause which would have prevented her revealing the allegations. She was then dismissed. When she challenged the sacking at an industrial tribunal she won an out of court settlement *without* a secrecy clause, which she accepted in 1989. Her dismissal was retracted and her legal costs paid.

Alison Taylor continued to campaign for action. She discovered that other social workers had made complaints before she did, with no result, but many others remained silent about what she said was "virtually common knowledge within the county". She was also approached by other young people with many more accounts of abuse in the regions' children's homes. Yet her approaches to the Welsh Office, the social services inspectorate and others produced no result. In 1991 she took a dossier of allegations from over 100 young people to the police. Police inquiries later led to the conviction of seven care workers for abuse but Alison Taylor believed this was only the tip of the iceberg and that more than 2,000 children may have been abused. It later became apparent that there had been as many as ten internal inquiries by local authorities into abuse in these homes, none of which was published, or led to effective action. One reason for the secrecy was pressure exerted by the council's insurers, Zurich Municipal, who threatened to withdraw their cover for Clwyd county council if details of the investigations - which might lead to more claims for compensation - were made public. Finally, after years of failing to act, a judicial inquiry was set up and last month began taking evidence about the child abuse. Alison Taylor's refusal to be silenced has been one of the critical factors in finally bringing the scandal into the light.