

ECONOMIC (IN)JUSTICE

FACTSHEET - STORY

Name	Paul Rutherford
Details, area of experience	Fought the housing benefit reductions (Bedroom Tax)
Interview date	November 2020
Issues addressed	Disability; the Bedroom Tax and the welfare state;
Injustice category (linked to economic injustice)	ability <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> age <input type="checkbox"/> class <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> faith <input type="checkbox"/> gender <input type="checkbox"/> neuro-diversity <input type="checkbox"/> race <input type="checkbox"/> sexuality <input type="checkbox"/>
Dates mentioned	2012-2013 housing benefit reductions
Locations referenced	Pembrokeshire
Campaigns, movements, protests	Campaigns against the 'Bedroom Tax'; Child Poverty Action Group;
Historical context	Austerity from 2012.
Tactics	Writing about the story; attracting media attention; working collaboratively with big campaign groups; legal action.
Key words	Disability Complex care needs Housing benefit Legal challenges Media interview and campaigns Moral support

Key points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Profound disability and the need to care for someone 24/7 and how hard that is and benefits changes would have made their lives even harder. ● The welfare system does not always provide a safety net for people and how harsh the system can be. ● Media and legal challenges changed their circumstances: working with other groups and the media led to them winning discretionary payments from the local council. ● People's support is important because it offers strength to carry on. ● The legal challenge won and changed the system for everyone else (nobody had money taken off them for 'spare' rooms if they had a disabled person in the house).
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Story summary	<p>Paul Rutherford tells the story of how he and his wife Susan fought to overturn a policy that would have seen housing benefit reduced if you had a spare room, dubbed the 'Bedroom Tax'. The family, who needed the room for an overnight carer to help look after their disabled grandson, took their case to the High Court and won.</p> <hr/> <p>Paul and Susan Rutherford care for their teenage grandson, Warren, who has a rare genetic disorder, Potokoi-Shaffer Syndrome, and is unable to walk, talk or feed himself. The family live in a 3-bedroom bungalow that has been specially adapted to meet Warren's needs. Paul and Susan share one room, Warren sleeps in another and the third room is needed for the carers to stay overnight and to store Warren's equipment. Without the help of overnight carer workers Warren would have to be put into residential care. In 2012-13 the government implemented a policy to reduce the housing benefit of households deemed to have a spare room in their homes (dubbed the Bedroom Tax). There was an exemption to the Bedroom Tax in cases where an adult disabled person needed an overnight carer, but this rule did not when it is a disabled child. Despite not thinking the rule would apply to them the family was deemed to be "under-occupying" and their housing benefit was reduced by 14% (£12-13pw). Paul decided to write about their experience and Sangeeta Enright from Grandparents Plus picked it up and started helping the family with legal proceedings.</p> <p>They started to work closely with Child Poverty Action Group and in 2013, launched a judicial review challenging the 'Bedroom Tax'. But because the family had been receiving discretionary payments from the local authority to cover the shortfall in rent (money they had won because Channel 4 got involved with their story) their case was dismissed by the High Court in 2014. The case went to the Court of Appeal in January 2016 and, surrounded by people</p>
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	<p>supporting their campaign with banners and placards, the Court ruled that the treatment of the Rutherford's was discriminatory. Later that year, in November 2016, Paul and his wife brought the case to the Supreme Court, which agreed with the Court of Appeal that there was no good reason for treating children and adults who have the same needs differently and so the Rutherford's won their case. As a result, the law changed so that anyone who was caring for a disabled young person would not be subject to a reduction in benefits if they had a 'spare' room.</p>
<p>Stand-out quotations</p>	<p>"We went on Channel 4 News and within two days we had this discretionary payment come through. So, we put it down to the fact that we went on national TV that changed everything for us."</p> <p>"It is very, very daunting when you go to places like the Supreme Court, the High Court, the Appeal Court but these are all places that people like us don't go to. These are the places you read about in the news and you hear about on the radio."</p> <p>"The solicitors and barristers for the government were saying things that were so beyond our understanding and belief that it was so unreal. One of the things that they said that I will quote until the end of my life about Sue and myself was that for us to require help with Warren was nothing but a life-style choice."</p> <p>"To stick your head over the parapet and say yes we will fight you."</p> <p>"The fight became not just about ourselves ... but it became on behalf of 100s of other families out there in the UK who were suffering the same cut to their weekly income."</p> <p>"If you think that you are right and you believe in your heart that you are right and that whatever it is you are challenged with is wrong ... go for it, don't be frightened, don't be fearful, be strong."</p>
<p>Main themes for learners</p>	<p>Changes to the welfare system and how it can change people's lives.</p> <p>Visibility: how to challenge those in power (legal and media route).</p> <p>Resilience: demonstrating hard it might be to challenge power but that it can be done.</p> <p>Empowerment through storytelling and campaigning.</p> <p>The power of solidarity and trying to help others.</p>

