BRIL was set up in late 2019, and is led by Disabled people, Autistic people, people with living with chronic illness and mental health service users. We work alongside other local and national groups including the Social Work Action Network.

We felt that a group, independent of councils and charities, was needed to campaign for Independent Living in our area.

We are concerned that the meaning and language of independent living, as developed by Disabled people, is being misused. Some Disabled people in Bristol, particularly in residential or ‘supported’ living feel independent living has been hijacked, and used to justify cuts to support. This meant everybody was doing everything their own. We also want to challenge the way ideas like ‘strength based assessment’ have been misused to label Disabled people, asylum seekers and mental health service users / survivors as ‘dependent’ and had their support taken away.

As we know, this is not what we meant by independent living.

* Everyone needs support.
* Everyone should have equal choices about their lives.

BRIL is based in the South West - the largest ‘region’ in the country, with areas of extreme poverty and division – both in urban and rural areas. Disabled people outside of Bristol have told us they feel disconnected from ‘the movement’ and the needs of rural communities are not recognised. Despite the efforts of DDPOs over the years, we don’t have the same regional networks found elsewhere. The concentration of services and voluntary sector groups in Bristol does not always benefit the area. Austerity and competition has caused fragmentation and a move to 'business' models.

User led, grassroots and self-advocacy organisations in the South West are struggling for support and funding.

Yet at this time groups that are prepared to hold authorities to account are more important than ever.

Disabled people & front line workers tell us they are not listened to, while others are scared to speak out of fear of losing housing, education, support or jobs.

Coronavirus has magnified the current Government's failure to consider and involve Deaf and Disabled people, with tragic and dehumanising results.

Locally we have had to pressure our local council for information, to be told this week for example, that only 50 sets of PPE had been distributed to direct payment users, and despite our offers to work with our council to produce EasyRead information, nothing has happened.

We need a radically different approach built on social model and human rights principles. We need a National independent living support service, that includes everyone.

Although unfunded and led by volunteers, BRIL is very active and makes sure everyone can contribute. This includes;

* Meeting with - and challenging - the local authority.
* Lobbying MPs about potential human rights breaches under the Coronavirus Act, Adult Social Care Plans, and discrimination in health guidance.
* Seeking research funding with universities.
* Events exploring disability history, mental health, racism, migration and better ways of building solidarity.
* Working with a publisher on a book of ‘untold stories’ of disability
* Drawing attention to the lack of accessible information locally and nationally.
* Started to make and share EasyRead information on Coronavirus.
* Contributing to the Disability News Service.
* We are also currently working with legal firms in relation to certain policies

After the virus we will come back to campaigning for independent living.

Owing to the economic climate ahead BRIL will become even more vocal to make sure disabled people rights are not moved backwards.