I have put out a call asking people about their voting and how it all happens. A lot of people told me they did not vote because it cost them money in a taxi to get to the voting booth, they also could not always get a staff member to go with them (if you need someone to push you in a manual wheelchair or if you are nervous about going out on your own). It seems most people use postal votes and they found this the best solution as they could vote at home. People talked about going to a polling booth and having to vote outside on the steps as the booth was not accessible, they talked about the staff at the polling booth not helping them to cast a vote, people were told they could not vote if they could not speak their choice (even though they had a communication board or a voice output device), one man talked about standing outside in the rain as the place had 2 steps to get in and he could not draw the attention of anyone to vote, so he went back home and did not vote. All of these experiences were from the past few years not long, long ago.

The most interesting story I heard is from a woman in her late 60s. When she turned 18 her mother went to try to enrol her to vote and she was told if she can’t sign she can’t vote. So until 1 year ago she has not voted. Someone told her this was ridiculous and she should vote, so she went to find out about it and again was told she had to sign and needed a letter from her doctor outlining why her disability meant she could not sign. She did do this and is now voting, but that sounds pretty amazing.

I am sorry this is a close to a submission as I have time for, hope you can pass these thoughts on. Most of the people I have spoken to said they would happily come along and tell people about what has happened, including the lady who can’t sign.

Rhonda Joseph
23 October 2007