

Disability Rights Vermont

Protection and Advocacy for Voting Access

Post-Election Program Evaluation

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I. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of Disability Rights Vermont's (DRVT) Post-Election Program Evaluation, conducted following the 2008 General Election. The primary goal of this evaluation was to learn about the voting experiences of our clients and gain new insights in order to improve our work promoting education and equal access for individuals with disabilities to successfully participate in the electoral process.

Sixty-eight former DRVT clients voluntarily participated in the Post-Election Program Evaluation. We are grateful for the input these individuals provided to us about their voting experiences, possible barriers to successfully participating in the electoral process, and recommendations for improving the voting process and the services we provide to voters with disabilities around the state. As a part of the Post-Election Program Evaluation, DRVT also provided thirty-four participants with additional voting assistance, including helping participants register to vote, confirming voter registration status, providing information about polling place locations, transportation options to the polls, absentee ballot requests forms, and providing copies of DRVT's *Voters' Guide for Individuals with Disabilities* to participants who requested this publication.

Results of the Post-Election Program Evaluation indicated that a high percentage of people surveyed, all of whom had prior contact with DRVT, were registered to vote and had voted in the 2008 General Election. In addition, although a majority of individuals who responded to our survey reported a favorable voting experience, many indicated that additional assistance with voter registration, information about candidates and issues, transportation, and help at the polls would be important to increase voter participation by people with disabilities in Vermont. Specific areas identified for improvement or continued focus by DRVT included conducting outreach to people with disabilities living in supported housing and independently in the community, providing people with information about transportation to the polls, candidates and issues, as well as individualized information and reminders about when, how, and where to vote.

DRVT wishes to acknowledge our gratitude for the assistance provided throughout this project by Dr. Michael Giangreco and Dr. Jesse Suter of the University of Vermont's Center on Disability and Community Inclusion (CDCI), part of the network of University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities. We also wish to thank Susan Ryan, Executive Director of the CDCI, for her support of this valuable partnership.

II. BACKGROUND

Disability Rights Vermont is a private, independent, not-for-profit agency mandated by federal law to protect and advance the rights of individuals with disabilities. DRVT is Vermont's designated protection and advocacy system and is a member of the National Disability Rights Network (NDRN). DRVT receives federal funding through a variety of grant sources including Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities (PADD), Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness (PAIMI), Protection and Advocacy of Individual Rights (PAIR), Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security

(PABSS), Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Traumatic Brain Injury (PATBI), and Protection and Advocacy for Voting Access (PAVA).

DRVT's PAVA Program priorities include, but are not limited to: voter registration, voter rights presentations, polling place accessibility, and raising awareness of voting rights for individuals with disabilities.

Since 2004, DRVT staff has provided voting outreach and education to thousands of individuals with disabilities residing in residential care homes, inpatient facilities, correctional facilities, and living independently in communities throughout Vermont. As a result of these efforts, DRVT has opened individual PAVA service requests for over 600 people with disabilities, the majority involving assistance with voter registration and requests for absentee ballots.

Prior to the 2008 General Election DRVT completed a Pre-Election Program Evaluation designed to help identify and educate our staff about internal and external barriers to full participation in the electoral process that our former PAVA clients may have experienced. We also wanted to learn, through a data driven model, whether our voting outreach efforts were viewed positively by our clients and whether they had specific ideas for improving our voting services. Clients who participated in the Pre-Election Program Evaluation recommended that DRVT:

1. Continue making voting outreach a priority, particularly through direct contact with individuals with disabilities in a variety of community-based and residential settings;
2. Provide comprehensive information and education about the voter registration process, alternative voting methods, and information about candidates running for office;
3. Provide more consistent and effective follow up with clients regarding voter registration confirmation, absentee ballot request forms, and polling place locations;
4. Ensure that individuals with disabilities have adequate transportation resources available in order to exercise their right to vote in person at their official polling places if they so choose.

The full report (published under our former name, Vermont Protection & Advocacy) may be found on-line on DRVT's website: www.disabilityrightsvt.org.

As a result of these recommendations, DRVT continued to make voting outreach a priority; we published an updated *Voters' Guide for Individuals with Disabilities* and distributed over 3500 copies around the state; and we revised our voter assistance policies and practices to incorporate consistent follow up with clients and improved communications regarding voting information.

III. PROCEDURES

The DRVT Post-Election Program Evaluation participant selection pool consisted of non-incarcerated¹ individuals with disabilities for whom DRVT had provided specific case services, i.e. legal advocacy, technical assistance, abuse/neglect investigations, and/or representation at hearings across all major grant sources between January 1, 2006 and December 31, 2009. This resulted in a participant selection pool of 421 former clients.

With the assistance of research consultants at the CDCI, a survey instrument was developed for administration by mail, telephone, or face to face. One DRVT staff person was assigned as the principal evaluator and that person coded each survey with an individual participant number then mailed the surveys to each former client who met the above noted participant criteria. The principal evaluator also followed up with potential participants who indicated their desire to complete the survey by telephone or in person.

DRVT Post-Election Program Evaluation surveys were mailed to the last known address of each of the 421 former clients identified as noted above, along with a postage paid business reply envelope. Many of these surveys were returned to DRVT by the post office as undeliverable. Surveys were re-sent to those individuals for whom the post office had provided a forwarding address. Potential participants were offered a choice to not participate at all or to voluntarily participate in the survey by mail, by telephone, or in person. Sixty-eight former clients agreed to participate in DRVT's Post-Election Program Evaluation: sixty by mail, five by phone, and three face to face.

Survey response data was coded to preserve the confidentiality of participants, entered into an Excel spreadsheet and reviewed by the principal evaluator. Statistical analysis of the data was conducted by consultants at the CDCI using SPSS software with results provided directly to the principal evaluator. The principal evaluator also responded to participants' specific requests for additional voter assistance.

IV. LIMITATIONS

The information reported upon below as provided by participants is incredibly valuable to our organization as we continually strive to improve upon the services we provide, however the results of DRVT's Post-Election Program Evaluation are not able to be generalized to Vermont's larger disability community due to the limited sample size. Notwithstanding the small sample size, the voting trends, experiences, and recommendations identified by participants are instructive toward DRVT's goal of evaluating and improving upon our PAVA work.

One limitation of DRVT's Post-Election Program Evaluation is the potential effect of response bias. Because the survey was administered by an agency that had previously provided participants with some type of advocacy assistance and because participants may have a need for our agency's services again in the future, there is the possibility that some answers were skewed

¹ Prisoners with disabilities in the custody of the Department of Corrections were purposely excluded from the sample for several reasons. We are aware that prisoners face specific barriers regarding their right to vote, including limited access to information about candidates and being allowed to vote by absentee ballot only.

in a more positive direction based on participants' attempts to answer in a favorable way. In addition, although former clients were provided the opportunity to participate in the evaluation by mail, telephone, or in person, the initial contact to inform each individual of the evaluation was made by mail. Not only did we receive a large amount of surveys returned to our office without having reached our former clients, we may have unintentionally filtered out several potential participants with visual or reading disabilities as well.

V. PARTICIPANTS

At the time of participation in the Post-Election Program Evaluation the age range of the sixty-eight participants was from 19 to 76 years old with a mean of 46. There were a total of 29 males and 39 females. 32 towns and cities across Vermont were represented by participants, with the largest percentage of individuals from Montpelier (10%), Burlington (9%), Barre (7%), Rutland (7%), Bennington (6%), and Waterbury (6%). 47 participants reported living in independent housing, 7 in residential care homes, 6 in parents' or family member's homes, 3 in assisted living homes, 2 in guardian's homes, 1 in a nursing home, and 2 in other types of housing.

Primary disabilities were identified by the 68 participants as follows:

- Mental Illness: 34 (50%)
- Physical/Motor: 10 (15%)
- Learning Disability: 7 (10%)
- Developmental Disability 7 (10%)
- Hard of Hearing or Deaf: 4 (6%)
- Traumatic Brain Injury: 2 (3%)
- Other Disability: 4 (6%)

Secondary disabilities were identified by 40 of the 68 participants as follows:

- Mental Illness: 11 (16%)
- Physical/Motor: 11 (16%)
- Learning Disability: 10 (15%)
- Hard of Hearing or Deaf: 5 (7%)
- Visual Disability: 1 (2%)
- Other Disability: 2 (3%)

VI. RESULTS

This section will provide a breakdown of the responses provided by participants generally and also specifically by participant characteristics such as age, living arrangement² and disability types. See Appendix A for detailed participant characteristic response results.

² For purposes of this evaluation "living situations" were categorized as "Independent" for respondents who indicated that they lived in independent housing and as "Other" for respondents who indicated that they lived in either residential care homes, parents'/family members'/guardians' homes, assisted living homes, nursing homes, or other types of housing.

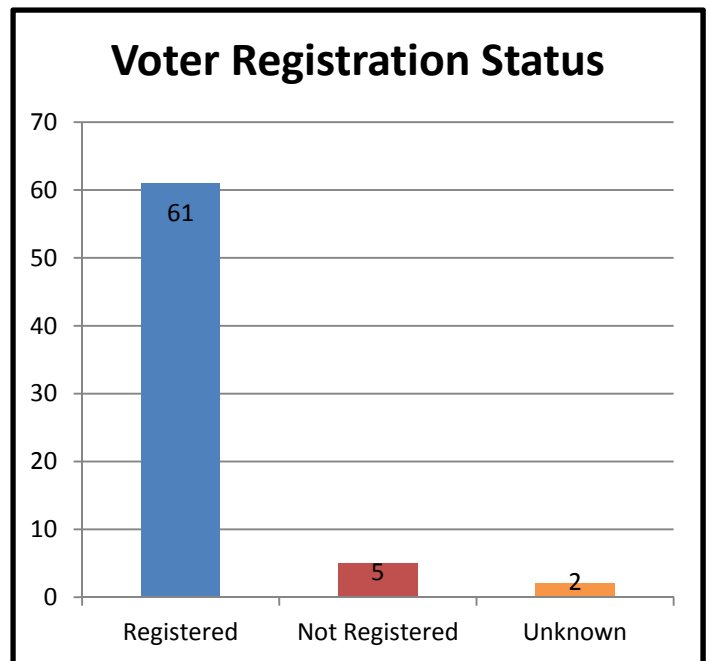
1. Are you a registered voter?

Yes = 61 (90%) No = 5 (7%) Unsure = 2 (3%)

90% of participants reported that they were registered voters at the time of the Post-Election Program Evaluation, while 7% (5 participants) were not and 3% (2 participants) were unsure of their registration status.

The reasons for either not being a registered voter at the time of the evaluation or being unsure of one's voter registration status were reported by participants as follows:

- A need for information about how to register to vote (3 respondents)
- A need for information about where to register to vote (2 respondents)
- Not interested in voting (2 respondents)
- I didn't know I had the right to register to vote (1 respondent)
- Other (2 respondents)
Moved and don't think I have re-registered.
Moved and need to register in new town.



Fortunately, none of the participants reported that either they were told they could not register to vote or that they tried to register but their application was denied by their Town Clerk.

The results demonstrate that a very high percentage of participants were registered voters. Although we did not specifically ask participants during this evaluation whether they had received DRVT assistance to become registered voters, it is possible that because all participants had prior interaction with DRVT, they may have been offered voting registration assistance at the time of their initial contact with our organization. It is also possible that individuals with disabilities seeking DRVT services are likely to be generally interested in exercising their civil rights and therefore likely to have become registered voters prior to any DRVT involvement.

Based upon these results, DRVT should continue our practice to prioritize the provision of voter registration assistance and information to all people with disabilities we encounter during outreach, monitoring, and intake procedures.

100% of participants aged 30-39 reported that they were registered to vote while the lowest percentage of registered voters, 81%, were in the 50-59 age group. The two participants who were unsure of their voter registration status were aged 50 or older.

These results may indicate a potential need for DRVT to make efforts to offer additional voting registration assistance to older adults living with disabilities.

Participants living in independent housing reported being registered voters at a lower percentage than those living in other types of housing. In fact, 20 out of 21 participants who did not live independently reported that they were registered voters, while the other 1 out of 21 reported that he/she did not know his/her voter registration status. The most common reasons provided for not being registered voters, such as not knowing how to register, not knowing where to register, or not being interested in voting, were reported at a higher rate by those who lived in independent housing. It is possible that individuals in assisted living situations may have more access to voter information and assistance than their peers who remain living independently.

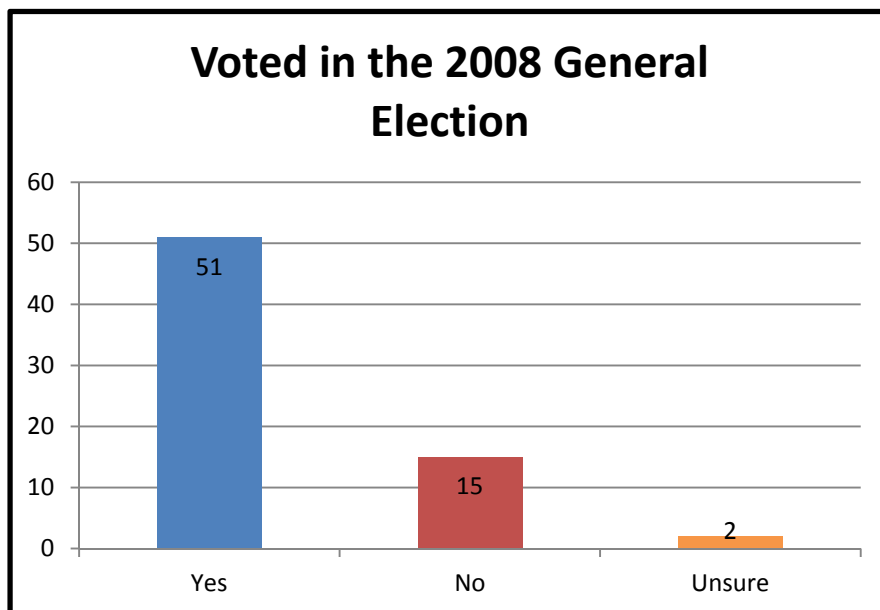
DRVT should consider augmenting voter outreach to individuals with disabilities living independently to assure they have access to necessary voter information and assistance.

A higher percentage of respondents who identified a primary disability of mental illness (32 out of 34) or developmental or learning disabilities (13 out of 14) were registered voters compared to those with other types of disabilities (16 out of 20). The rate of registered voters rose for those individuals who reported a secondary disability that was either physical, visual, deaf, hard of hearing, or traumatic brain injury – 95% of these participants reported that they were registered voters as compared to the 80% of registered voters with these types of primary disabilities.

Based upon these results, DRVT should consider augmenting voting registration outreach to current and potential clients who may have primary disabilities such as physical, visual, deaf, hard of hearing, or traumatic brain injury.

2. Did you vote in the November 4, 2008 Election?

Yes = 51 (75%) No = 15 (22%) Unsure = 2 (3%)



Although 90% of respondents indicated that they were registered voters, only 75% reported that they actually voted in the 2008 General Election, while 22% did not and 3% were unsure if they had voted. Fortunately none of the participants reported that they were told they could not vote or that they tried to vote unsuccessfully.

Generally, participants reported the following reasons for not voting in the 2008 General Election:

- Not registered to vote (3 respondents)
- Needed information about how to vote (3 respondents)
- Needed information about where to vote (4 respondents)
- Lack of transportation to the polling place (1 respondent)
- Didn't have enough information about the candidates (3 respondents)
- Was not interested in voting (5 respondents)
- Other (4 respondents)
 - Ill, in the hospital.*
 - I was working late and didn't like any of the candidates.*
 - Not a very good selection of candidates to vote for.*
 - Was too busy, sick, or didn't understand some of the things that were going on/were to be voted on.*

Based upon these results, in order to increase voter participation by people with disabilities DRVT should prioritize the dissemination of information about how and where to vote, along with the provision of candidate information, at each voting outreach opportunity for individuals with disabilities.

The highest percentage of participants who reported voting in the 2008 General Election were those aged 60 and older (90%) while the lowest percentage of voters were in the 18-29 age group (67%). Not one of the participants in the youngest age group indicated a disinterest in voting, rather the reasons provided for not voting were a need for information on how to vote, where to vote, and about candidates running for office. Of the participants who did not vote, those in the 40-59 age groups also indicated similar informational needs.

These results may indicate a need for DRVT to prioritize voter assistance, in the form of information about where and how to vote and about the candidates, to people with disabilities in the 18-29 year old age group, while continuing to provide this information generally at all outreach, monitoring and intake opportunities.

Even though respondents who did not live independently reported being registered voters at a higher rate, their actual voting percentage rates were slightly lower than those individuals with disabilities who lived in independent housing. Individuals who did not live independently had voting registration rates of 95% but only 71% of these respondents reported that they had voted in the General Election. 87% of individuals living in independent housing were registered voters while 77% of these respondents reported that they had voted in the General Election.

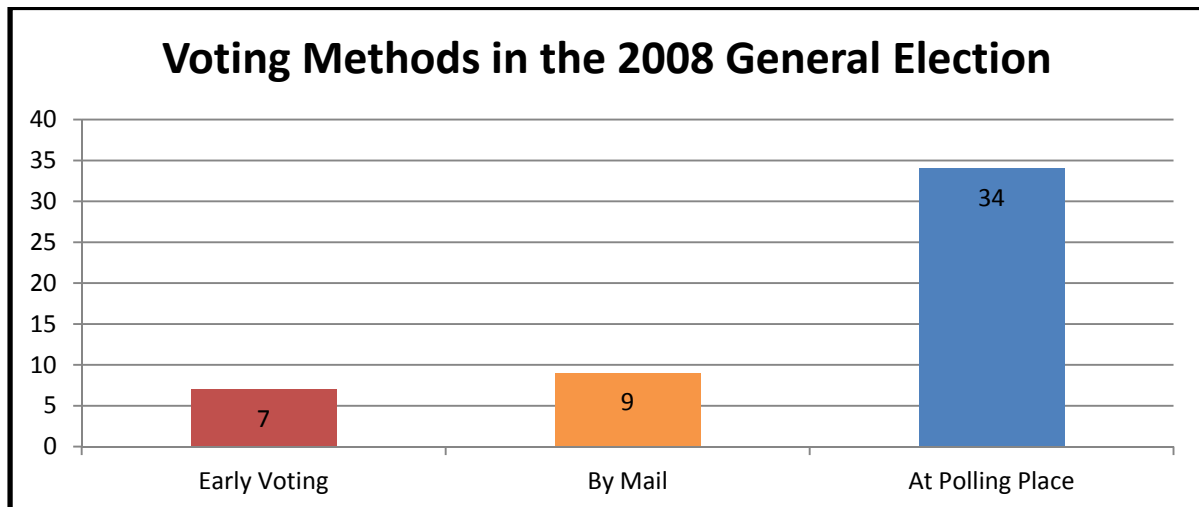
DRVT should consider supporting the addition of mobile polling place stations for individuals in assisted living environments and augment the voter assistance we provide regarding accessing the polls and voting methods to those individuals with disabilities not living independently.

There was no significant difference in the percentages of individuals with different types of primary disabilities who reported voting and not voting in the 2008 General Election and the most common reasons provided for not voting were generally spread across disability types.

3. How did you vote in the November 4, 2008 Election?

Early = 7 (14%) By Mail = 9 (18%) At the Polling Place = 34 (67%) Unsure = 1 (1%)

Of the 51 participants that had reported voting in the 2008 General Election 67% indicated that they had voted in person at the polling place on Election Day, 14% reported voting early, in person, at their town or city clerk's office, 18% voted by absentee ballot through the mail, and 1 respondent was unsure of the method he/she used to vote at that time.



The highest percentage of voters with disabilities who voted in person at the polling place during the 2008 General Election were those in the 30-39 age group. Respondents who were 60 and older reported a higher rate of voting by absentee ballot.

A much higher percentage of participants living in independent housing reported that they voted in person at the polling place during the 2008 General Election than did participants not living independently. Similarly a higher percentage of respondents who did not live independently voted either early at their town or city clerk's office or by absentee ballot as compared to participants who lived independently.

The percentage of participants who reported that they voted in person at the polling place on Election Day was much lower for those who indicated that their primary disability was either physical, visual, traumatic brain injury, deaf, or hard of hearing (38%) than participants who had

developmental or learning disabilities (82%) and those with a primary disability of mental illness (73%). The percentage rose from 38% to 64% of individuals voting in person at the polling place when physical, visual, traumatic brain injury, deaf or hard of hearing were reported as participants' secondary disabilities, however even that is still lower than individuals with primary disabilities of mental illness, developmental, or learning disabilities. Individuals with a primary disability of mental illness reported a higher rate of voting in person on Election Day than they did by absentee ballot or in person at the town or city clerk's office prior to Election Day.

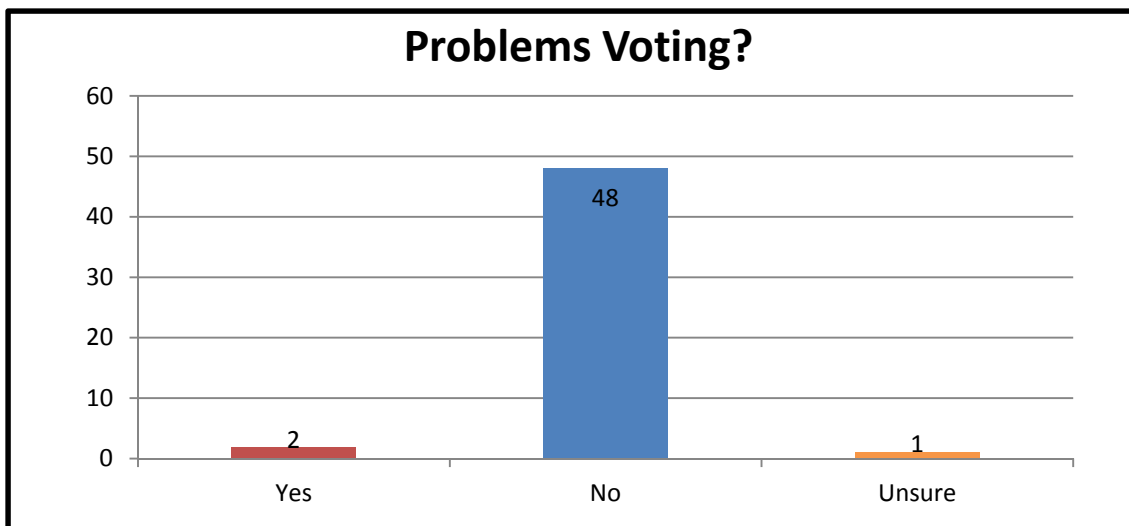
Individuals who reported primary disabilities as developmental or learning disabilities voted at a much higher rate in person on the day of the election than they did early but still in person at their town or city clerk's office. None of the respondents with a primary developmental or learning disability reported voting by absentee ballot and only 1 participant who reported a learning disability as his/her secondary disability voted by mail.

Considering this evaluation did not seek to gauge the reasons voters with disabilities chose the specific means they did to cast their vote and/or whether they have a preferred means of voting (i.e. early in-person voting, voting on Election Day at the polling place, or by absentee ballot) DRVT should seek additional information from voters with disabilities about their voting preferences, provide additional assistance to ensure that they are able to vote using their preferred method, and continue to conduct polling place accessibility surveys to ensure that all individuals with disabilities are able to vote successfully in person if they so choose.

4. Did you experience any problems voting in the November 4, 2008 Election?

Yes = 2 (4%) No = 48 (94%) Unsure = 1 (2%)

Of the 51 participants that reported voting in the 2008 General Election, 94% indicated that they did not experience any problems voting in the 2008 General Election, 4% (2 respondents) reported that they did experience problems, and 1 participant (2%) was unsure.



When asked for specific information about voting problems experienced, participants provided the following information:

- Didn't know how to vote (2 respondents)
- Didn't know where to vote (1 respondent)
- Voting materials were not accessible (1 respondent)
Need more info on what people are applying for.
- Requested accommodations were not available/were denied (1 respondent)
Asked for assistance reading ballot but they said they were 'too busy' so I left and found a friend to help.
- Other (2 respondents)
*I had trouble getting support, someone to come with me to help read the ballot.
Some things were hard to understand such as titles, codes, programs.*

None of the respondents indicated that their right to vote was denied, that they were unable to get transportation to the polling place, or that they had requested an absentee ballot but did not receive it.

1 individual in the 18-29 age group and 2 in the 40-49 age group reported that they experienced problems voting in the 2008 election. 2 others who were unsure as to whether they experienced problems voting were in the 30-39 and the 40-49 age groups.

2 individuals who reported not living independently and 1 individual in independent housing stated that they had experienced problems voting in the 2008 General Election.

2 individuals who reported a primary disability of mental illness and 1 individual with a developmental disability as his/her primary disability indicated that they had experienced problems voting in the 2008 General Election. The problems experienced by respondents, broken down by disabilities, are as follows:

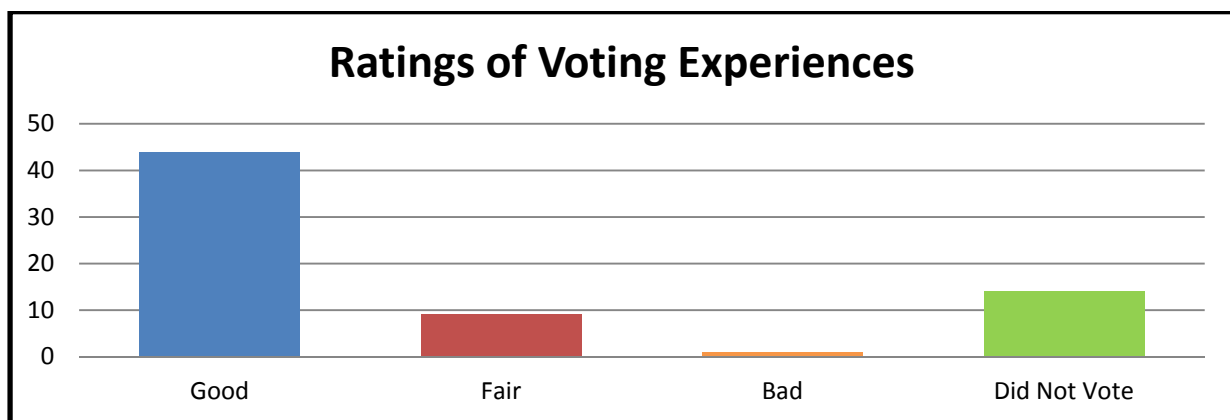
- *Did not know how to vote:* 1 individual with a primary disability of mental illness and a secondary physical disability and 1 individual with a primary developmental disability and a secondary learning disability responded affirmatively to this question.
- *Did not know where to vote:* 1 individual with a primary disability of mental illness and a secondary physical disability responded affirmatively to this question.
- *Materials were not accessible:* 1 individual with a primary disability of mental illness and a secondary disability of deafness responded affirmatively to this question.
- *Requested accommodations were not available:* 1 individual with a primary developmental disability and a secondary mental illness disability responded affirmatively to this question.

Based upon these results, DRVT should continue to prioritize the provision of accessible information about general voting information as well as ensure adequate training of polling place officials to provide requested accommodations for individuals with disabilities.

5. How would you rate your overall experience voting in the 2008 Election?

Good = 44 (65%) Fair = 9 (13%) Bad = 1 (2%) Did Not Vote = 14 (20%)

65% of participants rated their experience voting in the 2008 Election as good, 13% reported that their experience was fair, 2% (1 respondent) reported that his/her experience voting was bad, and 20% stated that they did not vote in that election.



Comments about participants' voting experiences were provided as follows:

- *Because I wasn't able to get the assistance I requested.*
- *Despite being intelligently informed... It all was somewhat confusing and I personally was not sure as to some various to be elected officials viewpoints, i.e. where they stood and/or their platforms within parties.*
- *I got there at a good time so it wasn't too busy.*
- *I had a very good experience there.*
- *I had had recent surgery and could not stand for very long. I asked for and received a chair and several people watched that I kept my place in line. When I reached my turn I asked for and received an aid to read the ballots to me (including explaining issues with which I was not familiar). The aid gave me no opinions or directions, just gave me the information on the ballot and the info sheet.*
- *I like to vote.*
- *I wish I had more money to buy the cookies and cakes that were there at the voting concession stand.*

- *Polls were at town clerk's office and a little tight for a big man with a cane.*

The highest percentages of participants who rated their voting experiences as good were in the 30-39 age group and those over 60 years old. Participants in the 18-29 age group had the highest percentage of reporting a fair voting experience rating, while the one participant who rated his/her voting experience as bad was in the 50-59 age group.

The percentage of individuals living in independent housing and those not living independently who rated their voting experience as good was almost even. One individual rated his/her voting experience in the 2008 General Election as bad and he/she reported not living in independent housing.

Participants who reported their primary disability as developmental or learning disabilities tended not to rate their voting experience as good as those who had a mental illness or other primary disability. One individual with a physical disability rated his/her voting experience in the 2008 General Election as bad. These rates were similar when comparing the percentages of individuals who reported that they had secondary disabilities of mental illness (82% rated their experience as good), developmental or learning disabilities (74% rated their experience as good), and secondary physical, visual, traumatic brain injury, deaf or hard of hearing disabilities (79% rated their experience as good).

While providing voting outreach to individuals with disabilities, DRVT should continue to discuss prior voting experiences with our clients and use that information to eliminate potential barriers to successful and favorable voting experiences in the future.

6. Do you have any suggestions for improving the voting process for individuals with disabilities?

Yes = 15 (22%) No = 43 (63%) Unsure = 8 (12%)

Participant suggestions were reported as follows:

- *A person who could be on hand to explain something to you that you don't understand on the form if you have a question.*
- *An explanation of what people are running for. Pamphlets explaining what responsibilities are.*
- *Handicap ramp for people who are in a wheelchair or use a cane.*
- *How do folks with degenerative eyesight vote? An election reader or perhaps someone to read?*
- *I'm concerned with elected officials cutting funding for home based services.*

- *In our rural area(s) I believe quite a few low income and more severely disabled individuals had no offered ride-share or means to get into local polling area and I know through our town clerk's offices that not many absentee ballots had been recorded/filed/received by date one day before/earlier.*
- *It would be nice to know there was a central place a disabled person could go (there is!) to ask for help. I had to keep asking at each step and then was taken to the central area where help is given by trained aids.*
- *Mail in option through disability office.*
- *Make ballots written in larger font so easier to read or allow someone (friend) to read it to the person voting.*
- *More volunteers to support people with disabilities at polling place.*
- *Possibly an ombudsman to help other people with disabilities to exercise their privilege to vote.*
- *Set aside a place for easy access of those who are big with canes, walkers, or wheelchairs.*
- *Should have someone to help read if needed.*
- *Transportation to polls, free bus available to get some people who need a car/pick up at home. Reminder of early voting via mail or at city hall.*
- *Try to have them get staff there to help people with disabilities. They should have extra people there to help folks who need it - staff that are trained and sensitive to the needs of people with disabilities.*
- *Vote from home easier.*

DRVT should work with the Secretary of State's Office, Town and City Clerks, and polling place officials to carry out these very useful recommendations in order to improve the voting process for individuals with disabilities.

7. Would you like Disability Rights Vermont to help you with any of the following?

34 participants (50%) provided contact information for follow up by the primary evaluator, with a breakdown of the types of assistance requested as follows, for a total of 60 types of additional assistance provided.

Assistance Requested	#	%
Help me register to vote	5	7.4
Confirm I am a registered voter in the town/city where I live	8	11.8
Give me information about the polling place where I can vote	9	13.2
Give me information about transportation to the polling place	7	10.3
Talk with me about difficulties I had with the voting process	2	2.9
Send me an absentee ballot request form before the 2010 election	11	16.2
Send me the <i>DRVT Voter's Guide for Individuals with Disabilities</i>	16	23.5
Give me some other type of voting assistance	2	2.9

The requests for DRVT voting assistance categorized by age demonstrated that more participants over the age of 40 responded affirmatively to the offer of information about transportation to polling places, while voters over the age of 50 asked for absentee ballot requests and DRVT Voters Guides at a higher rate than younger participants.

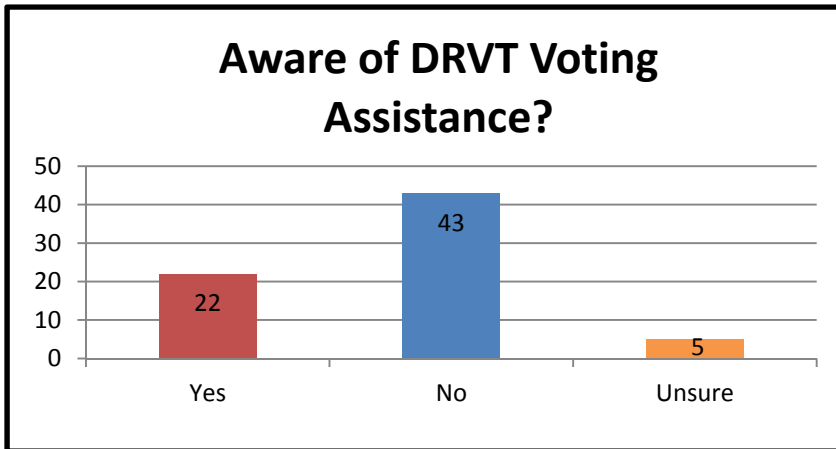
There were a higher percentage of participants in independent housing than in other types of housing who requested that DRVT provide them with information about transportation to the polling place and who requested that an absentee ballot request form be sent to them. Participants who reported not living independently asked at a higher rate than their peers living independently for DRVT to provide them with information about the location of their polling place and for a copy of DRVT's Voters Guide for Individuals with Disabilities.

Compared to individuals who reported developmental or learning disabilities as their primary disability, there were a higher percentage of participants with mental illness or physical, visual, traumatic brain injury, deaf or hard of hearing disabilities who were interested in receiving assistance to become registered voters, to be provided with information about the location of and transportation to their polling place, and to be sent absentee ballot request forms. 2 individuals with developmental disabilities were interested in speaking with DRVT about problems they experienced while voting in the 2008 General Election.

DRVT should continue prioritizing our availability to assist individuals with disabilities throughout the State of Vermont with all aspects of the voting process, including provision of accessible voting information, accommodations, transportation, and assistance with absentee ballot request forms.

8. Before today, were you aware of voting assistance available through VP&A/DRVT?

Yes = 22 (32%) No = 43 (63%) Unsure = 3 (5%)



63% of participants reported that they were not aware of voting assistance provided by DRVT (formerly VP&A) prior to the Post-Election Program Evaluation, while 5% were unsure and 32% reported that they did know that voting assistance was available through DRVT.

Of the respondents who indicated they were aware of DRVT voter assistance, 7 reported learning about our voting work from staff, 4 through our voter rights presentations, 2 from our brochures, 2 from our posters, and 4 through other means, including the *Independent* (Vermont’s newspaper focused on the community of people with disabilities), through Champlain Community Services, from information presented by DRVT at PAIMI Advisory Council meetings, and as a board member for the organization.

Participants who were 60 and older overwhelmingly indicated that they were aware of the voting assistance available through DRVT while those younger than 60 responded more frequently that they were not aware of the voting services we provide.

These results demonstrate that DRVT should make more efforts to publicize our voting rights work so that individuals of all ages with disabilities are better informed of our PAVA services.

A higher percentage of individuals not living in independent housing (11 out of 21) reported that they were aware of voting assistance provided by DRVT prior to their participation in the Post-Election Program Evaluation. Only 11 out of 47 respondents living in independent housing said that they knew about DRVT’s voting assistance.

DRVT voting rights outreach targeted towards individuals living in their own homes should be augmented.

A lower percentage of participants who reported mental illness as their primary disability (8 out of 34), as compared to other identified disabilities, indicated that they were aware of voting assistance provided by DRVT prior to their participation in the Post-Election Program Evaluation. 5 out of 14 participants with developmental disabilities or learning disabilities, and 9 out of 20 with physical, visual, traumatic brain injury, deaf, or hard of hearing disabilities said that they knew about DRVT’s voting services.

The high percentages of individuals in each of the disability categories who reported being unaware of DRVT's voting work suggests that DRVT should consider additional means of publicity and outreach, including reminder contacts with current and former DRVT service recipients, to assure people with disabilities we come in contact with are aware of and can access PAVA services..

9. Do you have any suggestions about how Disability Rights Vermont could improve the voting services we provide?

Yes = 5 (8%) No = 43 (63%) Unsure = 3 (5%)

5 participants answered yes, while 35 said no, and 24 were unsure about having any suggestions for DRVT to improve the voting services we provide.

Participant suggestions were recorded as follows:

- *Contact person in area; Each disabled person could assist one other disabled person.*
- *I didn't know you provided that service, how can you help people with disabilities with voting?*
- *Make sure people know it's time to vote - the date and the place and time.*
- *Making sure that buildings are handicap accessible/accessible to people with physical disabilities.*
- *More rides to the polls.*
- *Not without extra cost to the towns.*
- *Peer assistance, voter assistance at Adult Day Program.*
- *There should be more awareness created for folks with disabilities.*

DRVT should work with the Secretary of State's Office, Town and City Clerks, polling place officials and other disability advocates to augment the voting assistance available to individuals with disabilities by incorporating the recommendations of our clients as outlined above.

VII. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

According to a Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations *Fact Sheet: Disability and Voter Turnout in the 2008 Elections* by Lisa Schur and Douglas Kruse³ voter registration rates

³ http://www.aapd.com/atf/cf/%7B7BEF7AB230-F758-4C6B-8CEA-916D9108BFEE%7D/2008_Voter_Turnout_Full_Report.pdf

across the United States were 68.1% for individuals with disabilities compared to 71.4% of individuals without disabilities.

Schur and Kruse found that nationwide voter turnout in the 2008 elections for individuals with disabilities was 57.3% compared to 64.5% of individuals without disabilities. In Vermont, Schur and Kruse noted that individuals with disabilities voted in 2008 at a rate of approximately 58.7% and the voter turnout rate for Vermonters without disabilities was approximately 65.5%, both higher than the national average.

Participants in DRVT's Post-Election Program Evaluation reported very high rates of voter registration (90%) and voter turnout (75%). The data gathered throughout this evaluation does not allow us to draw any conclusions as to the reasons for the higher rates of voter registration and turnout by individuals with whom we have previously provided services, be they voter services or other protection and advocacy services, but it is gratifying to learn that people we have previously assisted tended to report a very high rate of engagement in the electoral process. Although a majority of participants reported voting in person at their polling place on the day of election, the evaluation did not capture whether the way in which participants voted was in fact their preferred method of voting. This will be a question that we will devote more attention to in our future PAVA efforts.

It is promising to have learned that very few participants experienced difficulties voting in the 2008 General Election. For those that did, DRVT will continue to take into consideration the specific experiences brought to our attention by participants as well as the many recommendations for improvement that were provided to us.

Specific recommendations formulated from the responses to DRVT's Post-Election Program Evaluation include the following:

- **DRVT should continue to prioritize the provision of assistance and information about how and where to register and to vote at each opportunity for contact with individuals with disabilities, including during outreach and monitoring visits and during intake procedures.**
- **DRVT should make efforts to offer additional voting registration assistance to older adults living with disabilities.**
- **DRVT should consider augmenting voter registration outreach to individuals with disabilities living independently to assure they have access to necessary voter information and assistance.**
- **DRVT should consider augmenting voting registration outreach to current and potential clients who may have primary disabilities such as physical, visual, deaf, hard of hearing, or traumatic brain injury.**
- **DRVT should make general voter education materials, including information on how, when and where to vote, more readily available and accessible to individuals with disabilities across the ages.**

- **DRVT should consider supporting the addition of mobile polling place stations for individuals in assisted living environments and prioritize outreach to these individuals specifically on the issue of different options people have to cast their ballot.**
- **DRVT should seek additional information from voters with disabilities about their voting preferences, provide additional assistance to ensure that they are able to vote using their preferred method, and continue to conduct polling place accessibility surveys to ensure that all individuals with disabilities are able to vote successfully in person if they so choose.**
- **DRVT should prioritize adequate training of polling place officials regarding the provision of reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities.**
- **DRVT should continue to discuss prior voting experiences with our clients and use that information to eliminate potential barriers to successful and favorable voting experiences in the future.**
- **DRVT should relay to the Secretary of State’s Office, Town and City Clerks, and polling place officials recommendations and experiences our clients relate to us about their voting experiences as a way of improving the voting process for individuals with disabilities.**
- **DRVT should make more efforts to publicize our voting rights work so that individuals of all ages with disabilities are better informed of our PAVA services, including reminder contacts with past and current DRVT service recipients and outreach targeted towards individuals with disabilities living independently.**

DRVT will utilize the responses obtained from both the Pre-Election Program Evaluation and the Post-Election Program Evaluation to improve our PAVA services and will regularly review our progress on these important efforts. DRVT expects to maintain our outreach to people with disabilities living in assisted living or institutional environments while at the same time increase our efforts to connect with people with disabilities living independently to assure that these individuals have the information and support needed to exercise their right to vote.

DRVT plans to continue conducting surveys and statistical analysis as part of our program evaluation and improvement efforts. Comments and other feedback regarding this report are welcome. Please contact Merry Postemski at (802) 229-1355 ext. 112 or email merry@disabilityrightsvt.org for more information or to discuss this report further.

Appendix A

A. Age

Age and Voter Registration Status

Age (& number of respondents)	Registered to Vote	Not Registered to Vote	Unsure
18 - 29 (9)	89%	11%	0%
30 - 39 (13)	100%	0%	0%
40 - 49 (20)	90%	10%	0%
50 - 59 (16)	81%	13%	6%
60 and older (10)	90%	0%	10%

Age and Voting Status in 2008 General Election

Age (& number of respondents)	Voted	Did Not Vote	Unsure
18 - 29 (9)	67%	33%	0%
30 - 39 (13)	69%	23%	8%
40 - 49 (20)	75%	25%	0%
50 - 59 (16)	75%	19%	6%
60 and older (10)	90%	10%	0%

Age and Voting Methods

Age (& number of respondents)	Early Voting (in person)	Absentee Ballot (by mail)	Polling Place on Day of Election	Unsure
18 - 29 (6)	33%	0%	67%	0%
30 - 39 (10)	0%	10%	80%	10%
40 - 49 (15)	7%	20%	67%	7%
50 - 59 (13)	15%	8%	69%	8%
60 and older (9)	22%	44%	33%	0%

Age and Problems Voting in 2008 General Election

Age (& number of respondents)	Yes, Experienced Problems with Voting	No, Did Not Experience Problems with Voting	Unsure
18 - 29 (6)	17%	83%	0%
30 - 39 (10)	0%	90%	10%
40 - 49 (16)	13%	81%	6%
50 - 59 (12)	0%	100%	0%
60 and older (9)	0%	100%	0%

Age and Voting Experience Rating

Age (& number of respondents)	Good	Fair	Bad
18 - 29 (6)	67%	33%	0%
30 - 39 (10)	90%	10%	0%
40 - 49 (16)	81%	19%	0%
50 - 59 (13)	77%	15%	8%
60 and older (9)	89%	11%	0%

Age and Requests for Voting Assistance

Age (& number of respondents)	Help Register to Vote	Confirm Voter Registration	Provide Info about Polling Place Location	Provide Info about Transportation to Polling Place	Talk about Problems Experienced Voting	Send Absentee Ballot Request	Send DRVT Voters Guide
18 - 29 (9)	11%	11%	11%	0%	0%	11%	22%
30 - 39 (13)	8%	15%	8%	0%	0%	8%	15%
40 - 49 (20)	5%	10%	20%	15%	5%	10%	20%
50 - 59 (16)	13%	13%	6%	6%	6%	25%	31%
60 and older (10)	0%	10%	20%	30%	0%	30%	30%

Age and DRVT Voting Assistance Awareness

Age (& number of respondents)	Yes	No	Unsure
18 - 29 (9)	22%	67%	11%
30 - 39 (13)	15%	77%	8%
40 - 49 (20)	30%	65%	5%
50 - 59 (16)	19%	81%	0%
60 and older (10)	90%	10%	0%

B. Living Arrangement

Living arrangement has been divided into two subcategories: respondents who indicated that they lived in independent housing (“Independent”) and respondents who indicated that they lived in either residential care homes, parents’/family members’/guardians’ homes, assisted living homes, nursing homes, or other types of housing (“Other”).

Living Arrangement and Voter Registration Status

Type of Housing (& number of respondents)	Registered to Vote	Not Registered to Vote	Unsure
Independent (47)	87%	11%	2%
Other (21)	95%	0%	5%

Living Arrangement and Voting Status in 2008 General Election

Type of Housing (& number of respondents)	Voted	Did Not Vote	Unsure
Independent (47)	77%	21%	2%
Other (21)	71%	24%	5%

Living Arrangement and Voting Methods

Type of Housing (& number of respondents)	Early Voting (in person)	Absentee Ballot (by mail)	Polling Place on Day of Election	Unsure
Independent (37)	8%	14%	73%	5%
Other (16)	25%	25%	44%	6%

Living Arrangement and Problems Voting in 2008 General Election

Type of Housing (& number of respondents)	Yes, Experienced Problems with Voting	No, Did Not Experience Problems with Voting	Unsure
Independent (37)	3%	92%	5%
Other (16)	13%	88%	0%

Living Arrangement and Voting Experience Rating

Type of Housing (& number of respondents)	Good	Fair	Bad
Independent (37)	81%	19%	0%
Other (17)	82%	12%	6%

Living Arrangement and Requests for Voting Assistance

Type of Housing (& number of respondents)	Help Register to Vote	Confirm Voter Registration	Provide Info about Polling Place Location	Provide Info about Transportation to Polling Place	Talk about Problems Experienced Voting	Send Absentee Ballot Request	Send DRVT Voters Guide
Independent (47)	11%	13%	11%	13%	4%	19%	21%
Other (21)	0%	10%	19%	5%	0%	10%	29%

Living Arrangement and DRVT Voting Assistance Awareness

Type of Housing (& number of respondents)	Yes	No	Unsure
Independent (47)	23%	72%	4%
Other (21)	52%	43%	5%

C. Disability Categories

Three subcategories of disability types are reported in this section: “Mental Illness”, Developmental or Learning (“DD/LD”), and “Other” which is comprised of individuals who responded that they have either a physical or visual disability, are deaf or hard of hearing, or have a traumatic brain injury (due to the low number of participants who reported some of these types as their primary or secondary disabilities).

Primary Disability Type and Voter Registration Status

Type of Primary Disability (& number of respondents)	Registered to Vote	Not Registered to Vote	Unsure
Mental Illness (34)	94%	6%	0%
DD/LD (14)	93%	7%	0%
Other (20)	80%	10%	10%

Primary Disability and Voting Status in 2008 General Election

Type of Primary Disability (& number of respondents)	Voted	Did Not Vote	Unsure
Mental Illness (34)	74%	24%	3%
DD/LD (14)	79%	21%	0%
Other (20)	75%	20%	5%

Primary Disability and Voting Methods

Type of Primary Disability (& number of respondents)	Early Voting (in person)	Absentee Ballot (by mail)	Polling Place on Day of Election	Unsure
Mental Illness (26)	8%	12%	73%	8%
DD/LD (11)	18%	0%	82%	0%
Other (16)	19%	38%	38%	6%

Primary Disability and Problems Voting in 2008 General Election

Type of Primary Disability (& number of respondents)	Yes, Experienced Problems with Voting	No, Did Not Experience Problems with Voting	Unsure
Mental Illness (27)	7%	89%	4%
DD/LD (11)	9%	91%	0%
Other (15)	0%	93%	7%

Primary Disability and Voting Experience Rating

Type of Primary Disability (& number of respondents)	Good	Fair	Bad
Mental Illness (27)	85%	15%	0%
DD/LD (11)	73%	27%	0%
Other (16)	81%	13%	6%

Primary Disability and Requests for Voting Assistance

Type of Primary Disability (& number of respondents)	Help Register to Vote	Confirm Voter Registration	Provide Info about Polling Place Location	Provide Info about Transportation to Polling Place	Talk about Problems Experienced Voting	Send Absentee Ballot Request	Send DRVT Voters Guide
Mental Illness (34)	9%	12%	18%	15%	0%	21%	15%
DD/LD (14)	0%	14%	0%	0%	14%	0%	29%
Other (20)	10%	10%	15%	10%	0%	20%	35%

Primary Disability and DRVT Voting Assistance Awareness

Type of Primary Disability (& number of respondents)	Yes	No	Unsure
Mental Illness (34)	24%	74%	3%
DD/LD (14)	36%	50%	14%
Other (20)	45%	55%	0%