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Stencil makes it easy for the blind

Blind voters made history yesterday by voting on their own.

Using a special stencil provided by the Elections Department, they could mark their ballot papers without help.

All the presiding officers had to do was tell them the order of the candidates on the ballot papers.

"It was very easy," said Mr Chee Kok Lum, 70, in Mandarin. "They slipped the ballot paper into a stencil and told me the order, and I marked the cross myself."

He was accompanied by his wife. Both of them voted at Zhangde Primary School in Jalan Membina.

The stencils come with box-shaped cut openings that correspond with each candidate's name on the ballot paper.

Previously, those in the 6,000-strong blind community had to rely on officials to mark the cross for them.

That had led to some unhappiness as the voters felt that their votes were not secret.



ST PHOTO NG SOR LUAN

Mr Tan Guan Heng, president of the Singapore Association of the Visually Handicapped, holding a special stencil provided by the Elections Department to enable blind voters to cast their vote yesterday.

At Holland Close, Madam Joy Leong was happy that she could vote on her own.

"After explaining to me, the officer asked me if I needed help. I said no, and she turned around while I voted," said the 70-year-old.

She added: "The stencil would be good for the elderly too so they would not draw outside the box."

The president of the Singapore Association of the Visually Handicapped, Mr Tan Guan Heng, said yesterday was a historic occasion for the blind.

"While we do not doubt the integrity of the officials, this is the first time that the blind can vote independently, freely and secretly."

He hoped that Braille ballot papers would be available by the next election.

Ng Kai Ling .