Have you considered diversity within your volunteer programme?

Diversity is recognising that no two people are alike and that the distinctions between people should always be respected. Diversity means difference, and people's differences can be many and varied. They may include - race, culture, national origin, region, gender, sexual orientation, age, marital status, politics, religion, ethnicity, disability, socio-economic differences, family structure, health, values and many more

Organisations should recognise this and ensure that equality and diversity is actively promoted between Board/Committee, staff, volunteers and members, as well as the community they work in. Managing diversity follows on from, and expands on equal opportunities. It is a more wide-reaching approach. Whereas equal opportunities is concerned with making sure that the law is upheld and that personnel decisions are fair and do not discriminate, diversity values rather than ignores differences between people. Diversity is about learning to include different perspectives and processes so that the work of the group or organisation can be as effective as possible, and to as wide a range of people as possible.

Organisations have to be prepared to adapt what they do and how they do it in order to be inclusive. To do this they should have an Equality and Diversity Policy which is developed and understood by everyone within the organisation and actively followed. Diversity should be at the heart of volunteer involvement not a bolt on to normal practice.

Benefits of a diverse team team include:

• The creation of a more positive and inclusive profile and public image

• Being representative of the wider society by the involvement of volunteers from different social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds

• Being more able to understand and respond to the needs of your local community

• New ideas and fresh approaches being generated by people from different backgrounds and with different outlooks

• A broader range of skills and abilities

• Helps your volunteers to be role models which will encourage others from similar groups to volunteer and help increase their aspirations

• More confidence in working with service users from diverse backgrounds

• Enhanced awareness within the organisation as a whole

• Eligibility for wider sources of funding