

Written by

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Ujamaa Place is seeking to challenge young African-American men (ages 18-28) to change their behavior and turn their lives around to become productive members of their families and communities.

Voyageur Outward Bound School (VOBS) is working with Ujamaa (www.UjamaaPlace.org) to provide rigorous, environmentally focused experiential programs that test an individual's own perception of what is possible through long- and short-term outdoor expeditions. The ultimate goal is to help the participants develop confidence so they can contribute positively to their families and their community.

"There is a lost generation of young men in our community. They've grown up impoverished and without fathers, they've dropped out of school, they've never held a decent job, they've become involved in drugs and violence, and they've already been to jail more than once," said Otis

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Zanders, president and CEO of St. Paul-based Ujamaa Place. "Without effective intervention, their prospects are dim, but we know that change is possible."

Beginning this spring, the new program physically and mentally challenges young men to redefine their concepts of themselves, manhood, success and positive community values. Zanders said by facing new challenges, young men are able to transfer their skills and knowledge to their own lives. Those in the initiative participate in numerous types of experiential leadership, team- and confidence-building programs, including backpacking and hiking, rock climbing and canoeing and skiing and snowshoeing.

Some of the area locations where the program will take place include Camp Saint Croix, Taylor's Falls, the Mississippi River, Blue Mound State Park and Superior Hiking Trail.

VOBS's program with Ujamaa aims to help the participants discover the strength of their character, their ability to lead and their determination to succeed. Zanders said through expeditions, participants gain self-reliance, trust and support, while learning from each other.

"The outdoor experiences can be transformational because the programs can help young adults – particularly those at risk – change their lives through challenge and discovery," said Zander