

Robert J. Benz

Co-Founder & Executive Vice President

Robert J. Benz is responsible for policy, programming and strategic development at *Frederick Douglass Family Initiatives* (FDFI). He created and led the development of FDFI's core philosophy behind its prevention education approach to human trafficking which included projects such as: *Frederick Douglass Dialogues*, *Abolition Day*, *100 Days To Freedom* and he authored FDFI's curricular works including – *History, Human Rights and the Power of One*, *the Trafficking Free Community* and *Globalize 13*. Robert was a founding partner in the PROTECT human trafficking training and education program in the State of California. He also created and developed FDFI's *One Million Abolitionists* project, which is striving to print and give away one million copies of the *Bicentennial Edition* of the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* to young people across the country. Robert was the Editor of this book.

Robert was first introduced to the issue of human trafficking when reading a September 2003 cover story in *National Geographic Magazine* called, *21st-Century Slaves*. He then suggested the idea of building an advocacy organization around the issue to his business associate and longtime friend, Ken Morris, thus leveraging Ken's unique family history, as a direct descendant of both Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington.

"Our history is not a compilation of detached facts but essential knowledge necessary for people, especially young people, to play a vital role in the global community. Slavery's past must be used to contextualize contemporary human trafficking. We all need to refresh our understanding of the issue as one person or one group's unwelcome control over another ... because it's all around us and its victims continue to suffer, in part, because of our ignorance."

Robert previously owned and operated a marketing company in the hospitality industry. With a focus on developing group meetings, conventions and niche consumer markets for clients, Robert designed and implemented sales and marketing programs for many of the country's most recognized hotel and casino brands. His company was also contracted by the largest cruise lines in the world to develop the incentive travel market. Ultimately, Robert's company produced some of the biggest music cruise charters ever, starring such acts as: The Dave Matthews Band, Kenny Chesney and Tim McGraw.

Robert is available for speaking engagements on subjects regarding *human trafficking*, *education* and *social justice* at conferences, universities and schools across the country. Presentation titles include: "Connecting Historical Slavery to Human Trafficking," "How to End the Demand for Abusive Labor" and "Why Pornography is No Longer Innocuous." Read Robert's writings in the Huffington Post.

Robert is an advisory board member for the *Cincinnati Museum Center*. He has been on the Board of Directors of the *Sojourn Foundation*, *There is Hope For Me*, the *Academy of Hospitality and Tourism* for Valley High School in Las Vegas and he served on the *Las Vegas Human Trafficking Task Force*.