

## Supporting Men Raising Kin

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Men can be the invisible, unsung heroes in kinship families. While only a small percentage of kin caregivers are men tackling this big job alone, they are out there—with distinct strengths and needs. A [2015 study](#) puts the share of solo grandfathers at about 6 percent of grandparent caregivers, with solo grandmothers making up 15 percent. That means that 79 percent of grandparent-headed households include two grandparents. Other male kin caregivers, whether single or partnered, include brothers, uncles, cousins, and family friends. How can we make sure men are encouraged and supported in their roles as kin caregivers? We asked male kin caregivers to weigh in.

Doug B. is two years into his role caring for his wife's 7-year-old grandson following the death of the boy's mother from an overdose. There's no mistaking his anger as he tells his story about the way Child Protective Services (CPS) failed him and his grandson.

Bob R. has had a long time to think about his role in caring for his niece. She moved in with Bob and his wife when she was only 8, and she is now a young adult. In between, Bob and his wife separated, and he was faced with the prospect of raising a 9-year-old girl on his own. He wasn't sure how he would navigate the milestones ahead, or if the social worker would allow him to. The social worker's take: "Why would you think that? You're doing a great job!"

Gregory J. was known for lending his time, talent, and financial support to organizations that served his community. He was enjoying a comfortable life, and thought he had prepared his sons to follow in his footsteps. That was the dream. The reality: at an age when most people were considering retirement plans, Gregory and his wife were managing a household that grew to include five grandkids over the 13 years since their first grandchild was born.

**Doug, Bob, and Gregory graciously talked to us about where they found help, what help was missing, and how we might do a better job in reaching men.**

It was clear to Doug that he and his wife would end up raising their grandson, Bear. Bear's mom was using meth; his dad was abusing alcohol and living out of his truck. Doug and his wife secured temporary custody, then lost it when Bear's mom met the CPS criteria for reunification. Doug describes their anxiety during the time leading up to Bear's mom's death: "My wife and I both knew that the day would come when Bear would be living with us. What we didn't know was that we wouldn't get any help from CPS or anyone else on what to do legally, our rights, custody, transferring of his medical and dental insurance ... I spent hours researching how and what to do and still at times it is overwhelming and frustrating."

Doug says he's not the type of guy to seek out a support group, but he acknowledges that access to peers who "get it" has really helped. He says sometimes you need to call it

something else to get men in the door: **“You can offer a time to have a barbecue with lots of food and volunteers to watch your kids, and that in itself is a support group in disguise.”**

Gregory found support wherever he had connections—friends, family members, employers. And, later, in support groups for those with similar family struggles. He describes that environment as “no judgment. You hear their stories. You share your stories. And then you all move forward...” He recommends creating spaces specifically for men.

Bob remembers his first visit to a support group: “As time went on, I needed to have some support for myself, so I decided to go to a kinship care support group, assuming that I would walk into a room with a lot of gray-haired grandmothers, and I was surprised that there was a lot of family members that were there. There were sisters, there were brothers, aunts ... Just having people to talk to that were walking in my same shoes was really, really important to me.”

He recalls his niece’s difficult teenage years. “I didn’t know what trauma was, and [my niece] came with a whole suitcase of it.” His goal was modest: high school graduation with no teen pregnancy or arrests. They’ve made it that far, and beyond. He’s gone on to become an advocate for those in the situation he was once in, with the hope that he can make it easier for the next family to walk this path. Bob says, **“It’s a hard journey, and I’d do it all over again.”**

To learn more about supporting men who are raising kin children, check out Creating a Family’s [podcast](#) on this topic.

To hear more from our interviewees, visit our YouTube channel, where you can watch short videos in which [Bob](#) and [Gregory](#) share their stories.

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The Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network: A National Technical Assistance Center (Network) helps government agencies and nonprofits in states, Tribes, and territories work across jurisdictional and systemic boundaries to improve supports and services for families in which grandparents, other relatives, or close family friends are raising children whose parents are unable to do so. For more information, please visit [www.GKSNetwork.org](http://www.GKSNetwork.org).

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