

SMOC official a 'lifetime' advocate for addicts

By [Ariel Wittenberg/Daily News correspondent](#)

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FRAMINGHAM — The National Library of Addiction honored Jim Cuddy, executive director of South Middlesex Opportunity Council, with the Nathaniel Hakim Askia lifetime achievement award yesterday for his work combating drug addiction.

The National Library chose Cuddy to receive this year's award because he uses multiple approaches to combat addiction, the organization's founder Dr. Punyamurtula Kishore said.

"Addiction is a very confusing disease," Kishore said at the award ceremony at Garden in the Woods in Framingham. "Often times it's the elephant in the living room with seven blind men who each have a different way to cure it. One thinks it's by medicine, another spirituality, another through better housing.

"But what (Cuddy) understands is that if we pull all of those wagers together and use them all to combat addiction, we can make a difference. And he has done that," Kishore said.

Cuddy said he was familiar with the disease of addiction because he "came of age in the '60's and '70's when drugs washed over the youth."

"I had many good friends who dove down that rabbit hole of drugs," he said.

Through his experiences watching childhood friends become addicted to drugs, Cuddy said he realized the importance of peer groups and community in the treatment of drug addiction.

"I think of addiction as a fire. And sometimes that fire's in a fireplace with a seductive lure where you keep sticking your hand in and inevitably get hurt, and the question is how many times you are going to get burnt before you take your hand out and walk away. And sometimes it's a raging forest fire that devours and turns everything in your life experience to ash," he said. "But always you're going to need a peer group to help you get out of that fire."

Addicts who go to SMOC for services first receive group therapy because of Cuddy's conviction that peer groups are important to recovery.

Cuddy has not avoided controversy, however.

SMOC sued the town of Framingham and numerous town officials last year for what it alleged was discriminatory actions violating federal fair housing laws. The lawsuit and some of SMOC's housing and treatment programs have been a source of friction between the private non-profit and the town.

According to the Town Assessor's Office, SMOC owns 88 properties in Framingham.

Philip Manango, president of the American Round Table to Abolish Homelessness, presented Cuddy with his award.

"He is ignited with the passion to help others," he said. "He has shown us the unyielding example of how to emulate the Good Samaritan and has united us in a cause to help the most vulnerable of our neighbors."

As SMOC's executive director, Cuddy oversees an organization that had more than \$52 million in total assets and \$42 million in total liabilities in 2008, according to its most recent filing with the Attorney General's office.

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