MIDDLEBORO — The Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts (BIA-MA) is presenting an art exhibit called "Soaring without limits through the arts" displaying the artistic talents of several of its brain injury survivors and caregivers at the Middleboro Public Library until April 26.

"It’s therapy," said Donna Bonia, who helped organize the event, and who is the mother of a brain injury survivor. "It makes everybody feel good about themselves."

The BIA-MA is unique among brain injury organizations because it helps deal with all types of brain injuries, not just specific groups. The group helps the survivors heal and move on, and in the exhibit, each is given a chance to show their individuality and creativity.

"There isn’t a theme, it is wherever the interest may lie," said Ms. Bonia. "By each person’s work is their name and by their name is a bio explaining what happened to them." Some of these biographies are clipped, giving a basic history while others are very detailed.
Ms. Bonia said the BIA-MA is a place that brain injury survivors can go to help meet friends, participate in social activities, and just get on with their life.

"The problem with a lot of (brain injury survivors) is that they remember life before they were injured," she said. "They don't see themselves as handicapped exactly."

She said that in her son Rob's instance, he has made a lot of good friends through the BIA-MA that are dealing with similar yet different issues because the organization is open to accepting anyone.

Not only that, but Ms. Bonia has started a support group for the caregivers of the survivors. She said that she wanted to create a place where people could just talk, whether it be pleasant or not.

"We just get together," she said. "There is a lot of venting; sometimes I have speakers come in." She said that the most important function of the group was to show people that there is someone else out there.

"The biggest thing is to see that you're not alone," she said. "We sit, we talk, there's food, it's just a good place for people to let it loose."

All of this work ties together and in the instance of the art exhibit, they are actually given something tangible to present to the public to show what they are capable of.

"There's an inspirational element as well (as an artistic one)," said Library Director Danielle Bowker. "(The exhibit) is a nice way to show that someone with a brain injury still has skills."

According to Ms. Bowker, the library usually only needs to see that something looks good in the room and is appropriate for all audiences, but with the BIA-MA's exhibit, she was very impressed.

"It is a very professional display, with nice signs," she said. "It is very interesting to read the situation for the artist, to see what they've been through."

Thanks to a recent court case, Hutchinson V. Patrick, what brain survivors are going through is getting better. The landmark case is giving rights to brain injury survivors who are to well for a nursing home but not able to fully take care of themselves. The program helps get the survivors into an assisted living home, or an apartment of their own, with someone stopping by to help them when necessary.

"It was a huge, huge coup for the BIA," said Ms. Bonia.
The exhibit is at the Middleboro Public Library and will be open until April 26. The library is open Monday through Thursday 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., and Sunday 12 p.m. to 4 p.m. It is closed on Fridays.