Two nonprofit organizations with Westborough ties are reaching out to surviving victims of the April 15 Boston Marathon bombings, offering a range of resources from medical information to emotional support.

The Lancaster-based New England Amputee Association, which meets every other month at Whittier Rehabilitation Hospital in Westborough, quickly assembled an outreach team after reports that a number of victims lost limbs in the blasts.

“We’re waiting and contacting hospitals,” said New England Amputee Association Founder Rose Bissonnette.

Bissonnette said the association is trying to match bombing victims who lost limbs with peer visitors who are also amputees.

“I myself am an amputee from a traumatic incident and when you’re lying in the hospital, you’re just thinking ‘What’s next?’” she said. “I wanted to speak with someone who knew what I was going through and there was no one there.”

Once a hospital extends an invitation to the association, a peer visitor can go in and spend time with a patient to bring comfort and share his or her experience as a fellow amputee.

Bissonnette said peer visitors have not yet met with any victims of the marathon bombings, but she hopes to hear back from the hospitals treating these patients next week.

“There’s a whole realm of emotions that go with this,” she said. “We're making headway in letting people know that we’re open-door and we're here.

“The amputee community is feeling this tremendously. We know what traumatic loss is and we know what (these patients) are going through,” Bissonnette said.

Meanwhile, the Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts (BIA-MA), which is headquartered in Westborough, is trying to share information with another group of people affected by the bombs – those who may not necessarily know that they are victims.

Emmy Llewellyn, BIA-MA’s manager of marketing and communications, said any number of people who were in the vicinity of the blasts at the marathon finish line may experience headaches or hearing problems in the days after the attack. Both of these can be symptoms of a traumatic brain injury.

“You might not realize you have a brain injury until hours or days afterward,” Llewellyn said.

BIA-MA has an outreach coordinator who visits the hospitals at which the bombing victims are being treated, Llewellyn said.

“The outreach coordinator has been making herself available for counseling and calls,” she said.

Llewellyn highlighted the association’s free resources, which include a clearinghouse of information on therapists, attorneys and rehabilitation options for victims of traumatic brain injury.

“We like to partner with hospitals so they can direct patients to us once they are discharged,” she said.

Sara Mulkeen can be reached at 508-490-7475 or smulkeen@wickedlocal.com.
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Groups offer resources for victims

By Sara Mulkeen/Daily News staff
GateHouse News Service

Posted Apr 22, 2013 @ 12:00 AM

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