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## Shelter dogs stretch their legs on trail from Shippensburg

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By AMBER SOUTH

@ShipNewsGirl

SHIPPENSBURG — For dogs usually stuck in a cage, the Cumberland Valley Rail Trail offers a chance to stretch their legs, flex their paws and get acquainted with both canines and humans.

Through a program called Miles and Mutts, self-proclaimed Pack Leader Abbi Crowe and her small corps of volunteers each spend several hours a week running a few miles on the Shippensburg-to-Newville track with dogs that calls Better Days Animal League in Shippensburg their temporary home.

The goal is to give shelter dogs a better chance to find a forever home by giving them an outlet to use energy and develop socialization skills.



Good dog: Miles and Mutts volunteer Angie Roach kisses dog Abigale after a run in early June. Pictured behind them are volunteer Amy Kaufman and dog Trinket. (Courtesy)

“Since they’re housed in a kennel environment, they often don’t get a lot of exercise. When they’re cooped up like that they may not show well to potential adopters,” Crowe said.

There are currently seven canines in the Miles and Mutts pack. Each has a set number of miles that it can run, ranging from two to six. Xena, a treeing walker coonhound, leads the group with 27 miles run so far this year. As of Thursday, the pack had run more than 100 miles.

The number of miles a dog can run is based on how the dog does on its first run with Miles and Mutts.

“It takes a few minutes really and they start to calm down and you see their true colors shine,” Crowe said.

As long as it’s not too hot outside, a dog is outfitted in a yellow vest adorned with an “Adopt Me!” message that attracts attention from passers-by.

“Even without it, people will stop and ask because it’s a group of runners with a group of all different dogs,” said Amy Kaufman, a BDAL volunteer whom Crowe credits with helping to get Miles and Mutts up and running.

The hope is that awareness will lead to people adopting more dogs or wanting to be part of Miles and Mutts.

“We would be able to work with more dogs and make it regular with more dogs,” Crowe said.

Miles and Mutts got under way earlier this year but it has been several years in the making. Before she started changing the lives of dogs, Crowe upgraded her own by losing 50 pounds. A love for running developed out of the work to get there, as well as determination to make goals happen.

An advocate for shelter animals, Crowe had been a volunteer at BDAL for some time, but she did not feel she was making a big enough difference. While driving home from work one day, ideas started brewing and Crowe soon started Miles and Mutts.

“At first it was just me. First I tried to take a few dogs around there to see what ones would work. I just started taking one at a time and we kind of worked out some more details we needed for the other volunteers to get involved,” Crowe said.

By scrolling down the homepage of [www.milesandmutts.com](http://www.milesandmutts.com), anyone can read Crowe’s blog and find out what her pack of dogs and humans has been up to since those first days.

Maintaining regular updates is vital in making the public aware, Crowe said.

“I also do it in a happy and light manner because I think that’s a big thing that will get others looking at it regularly and (to be) something they’re interested in,” she said.

The running blog includes information about the Peace for Paws 5K, scheduled for Sept. 22 on the rail trail starting at Shippensburg Township Park. There will also be a 1K Fun Run for children.

“It dovetails nicely with the Miles and Mutts program because part of what we did last year was had volunteers bring dogs out from the shelter to run,” Kaufman said.

Kaufman deemed last year’s Peace for Paws, the first one, a success with about 150 participants, but said the goal this year is to double that number.

Registration is available at <http://www.active.com>. Fees vary depending on age and other factors.

For more information on Miles and Mutts and to learn how to become part of the pack, visit <http://www.milesandmutts.com>.

Amber South can be reached at [asouth@publicopinionnews.com](mailto:asouth@publicopinionnews.com) and 262-4771.

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