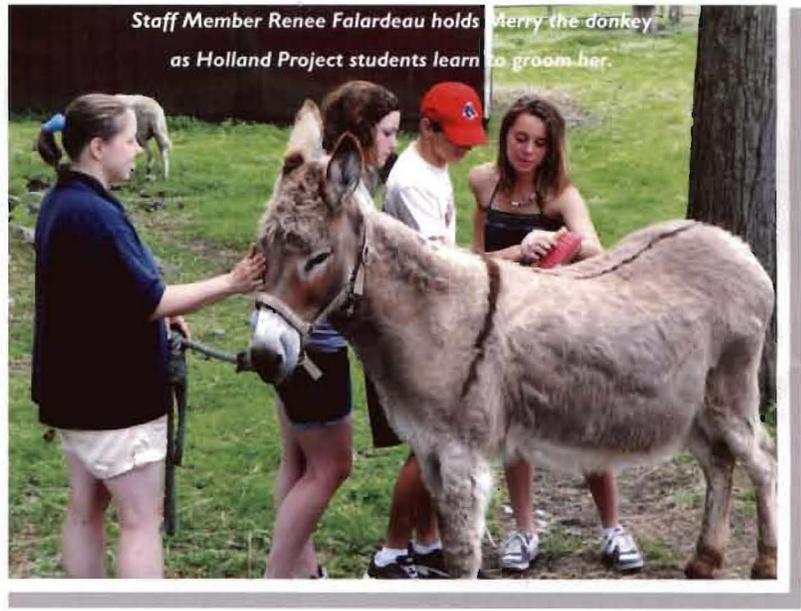


# Homeless Animals Lend a Helping Hand

The MSPCA's Equine & Farm Animal Center plays an important role in New England, as the only open admissions full service animal care & adoption center for farm animals in the region. Horse owners faced with the surrender of their beloved horse know that we will be there to help, in any situation. We also serve as an educational resource for owners with questions on animal care, behavior, and training.

This past spring, we had the opportunity to serve our community in a different way, and the animals we care for played an important role. Together with the founders of The Holland Project, we developed a pilot program for autistic teens. The Holland Project is a program for teens and young adults with autism and developmental delays designed to give them the opportunity to work in a farm environment. The teens work with highly trained volunteer supervisors to help with cleaning stalls and water buckets. The students are also able to spend quality time with some of our sheep and goats. What's really amazing about this program is the way these kids are helped by their time at the farm and the way our animals are helped in turn. This is a phenomenal relationship where animals in need are able to give back to help autistic teens.

The children involved in the Holland Project are able to benefit in many ways from being in a farm environment. This environment allows them to have structured, predictable tasks as well as the ability to address tactile issues that autistic individuals face by working with their hands. There are also wonderful social



benefits for these students. Working with volunteers in a similar age group helps to promote social skills, while working with and around the farm animals aids the students in creating bonds and emotional connections with other living beings.

One of the many highlights of our spring program was the time the students were able to spend with our donkey Merry. Merry had the unique status of being our 70<sup>th</sup> equine intake in 2009 (our highest number of annual intakes to date). At 22, Merry has seen a lot and loves to be pampered and groomed by her human friends, but she is also patient and kind with those who are still learning. Merry had a great day in the sun having the students learn how to groom and the children were able to enjoy the sights and sounds of being with Merry in her pasture.

Overall, the teens of the Holland Project have benefited from the structure and calmness of being in an agricultural setting and our animals and facility have been greatly enhanced by the help and extra attention that these teens and their volunteer mentors supply. We are looking forward to a new year of work with the Holland Project and hope to continue our partnership for many years to come.

To learn more about the MSPCA's Equine & Farm Animal Center, visit [www.mspca.org/nevins](http://www.mspca.org/nevins).



The Holland Project student, Diana, walks Gilbert, an adoptable dog

## Did You Know?

- The Equine Center uses 250 tons of hay, 220 tons of shavings, and over 17 tons of grain annually.
- The Equine Center is currently caring for over 4 dozen horses.
- In 2010, Nevins Farm will likely exceed the record-breaking 70 horses surrendered last year.