



## Donkey shortage hits Easter play

2:00pm Saturday 16th February 2013

By Andrew Ffrench

THE search is on for a crucial member of the cast for Abingdon's Passion Play.

Music teacher Sally Mears, who lives in the town, came up with the idea of staging the musical play based on the Easter story of Jesus's death.

But her dream won't be properly realised until she finds a donkey to carry teenager Chris Young, who plays Christ.

About 100 people are working on the production which will be performed in Abbey Gardens on Palm Sunday, March 24.

Three local schools' choirs are involved, together with the Abbey Brass band and a string quartet. Performers will move from one location to another in the gardens once the free show begins.

Mrs Mears and fellow directors approached Island Farm Donkey Sanctuary in Didcot Road, Brightwell-cum-Sotwell, in the hope that they could provide them with a donkey. But they were told that all 14 of the donkeys at the sanctuary which are used to take part in public performances have been booked for walk-on roles at local churches.

On Thursday, directors of the play met sanctuary manager John McLaren and he agreed that he would try to arrange a donkey for their show.

Director Sam Pullen-Campbell, from Radley, said: "It's a crucial part of the Bible story to have Christ with the donkey on Palm Sunday."

Mr McLaren, who lives at the sanctuary, said: "We have over 100 donkeys at the sanctuary but we need to have donkey handlers who have passed a day's course on handling donkeys to go out with them when they take part in public performances.

"Palm Sunday is our busiest day of the year as lots of local churches ask us if we can provide a donkey to take part in a parade.

"So far, we have made arrangements for 14 donkeys to visit different churches for Palm Sunday and we have reached the limit in terms of the number of handlers we can find.

"I can see that this production means a lot to the town of Abingdon and if we can't find a handler to do the job then I will try to step in myself — it could be a donkey called Tracy that I take."

Mr McLaren said churches are asked to make a £100 donation to the sanctuary and have to provide their own transport for the donkey.

He added: "It takes about five hours for one job because the girls at the sanctuary have to groom the donkeys — on Palm Sunday they will be getting them ready before it is daylight."

- For further information on the event or the donkey sanctuary visit [abingdonpassionplay.org.uk](http://abingdonpassionplay.org.uk) or [donkeyrescue.org.uk](http://donkeyrescue.org.uk)

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