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Corporate Sydney sets sail to help children with autism

Many of Sydney's most prominent companies will set sail on Sydney Harbour next month in a unique event designed to raise money for children who struggle to socialise and connect with others.

Now entering its seventh year, the Giant Steps Autism Regatta provides an opportunity for corporate Sydney to enjoy a beautiful spring day sailing on Sydney Harbour, to entertain clients and staff and to support a good cause.

The 2011 Giant Steps Autism Regatta will be held on Friday 14 October 2011 and will leave from the Middle Harbour Yacht Club, Mosman. Organiser Anna Trayner said the Regatta provided a wonderful opportunity for companies to network, team build and entertain clients on the spectacular playground of Sydney Harbour while also helping children with autism.

"The regatta is a premium event with truly superb food staged on the unique setting of Sydney Harbour," Anna said. "While supported by companies from all sectors, we are particularly proud of the support we receive from the engineering and construction sectors, which provides the majority of the fleet.

"It is a wonderful affirmation that they value the role they play in the community and are committed to finding ways to help children with autism spectrum disorders connect with others by taking this opportunity to themselves connect with their staff and clients."

Sponsored by Macquarie Group, participants from the engineering and construction sectors who have already registered for this year's event include Abigroup, Leighton Contractors, Bouygues Travaux Publics, Keller Ground Engineering, Tenix, GHD, VSL Australia, Theiss, John Hollands, Cardno, Haggie Reid and Aircraft Support Industries.

Anna said several companies took multiple yachts or requested a pair of yachts to "match race" amongst themselves, whilst also competing for the perpetual trophy for overall winner of the regatta.

The regatta is one of the major fundraising events on the Giant Steps calendar, with fundraising required to provide educational resources to assist children with autism participate as fully as possible in society. With one in every 110 children diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder, autism is more common in children than aids, cancer and diabetes combined. To date, funds raised have contributed to:

- improved early intervention services for newly diagnosed children with autism;
- playground equipment to promote social interaction;
- a multi-purpose resource room/ library;
- speech and occupational therapy services; and
- the establishment of a post school options program.

Companies can enter a yacht for as little as \$1,800 plus \$200 per participant. The yacht and skipper are provided and participants can choose to either act as crew or relax and enjoy the view. No sailing experience is necessary. The event culminates in a trophy presentation, celebration drinks and a gourmet barbeque dinner on the foreshore of the MHYC. For more information, go to www.giantstepsregatta.com or contact Anna Trayner on anna_trayner@hotmail.com.

Autism is a pervasive development disorder which severely affects social and communication skills. Giant Steps is a registered charity which sets out to improve the quality of life for children with autism and their families. Giant Steps accepts families from all backgrounds and socio-economic groups. While the Australian and NSW Governments provide approximately 40 per cent of Giant Steps' operating costs and 55 per cent of the cost of some capital works, the remaining funds must be raised through individual and corporate donations and parent-run fundraising events, such as the annual sailing regatta.