

# Two high-powered Vancouver business execs are changing maternity leave with Matur<sup>[1]</sup>

Jen Murtagh and Sonja Baikogli Foley are launching the program with founding partner SAP

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**Source:** BC Business

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 22 Oct 2021

## AVAILABILITY

Access online<sup>[2]</sup>

## EXCERPTS

Just over a decade ago, Jen Murtagh had what was surely one of the more coveted jobs in her hometown, as marketing manager of Canucks Sports and Entertainment. The team was in the midst of its West Coast Express era, and Murtagh was part of the team that stickhandled the move from the whale to the stick-in-rink logo.

But as she prepared to have her first child, the job and the industry didn't seem suited to her new life. "I left that organization because I didn't think I could have a baby and work there with game nights, travel, et cetera," she says. "So I was really intentional when I left there."

Having a baby also put her focus on the future. "I said to myself, I'm making a lot of rich people richer," Murtagh recalls with a laugh. "Now that I'm a mother, I want to do something that makes the world a better place." She ended up working numerous different jobs in the nonprofit sector, including serving as CEO of female leadership development provider Minerva BC and chief strategy officer at the BC Women's Health Foundation.

After leaving the latter to take on leadership coaching full-time, Murtagh had the idea to help women through what was one of the harder parts of her career—the maternity leave transition.

"Maternity leave was really tough for me," she says. "I remember transitioning back, going through so many scenarios. All these women are choosing to stay home; should I be doing that?"

She brought the idea to Sonja Baikogli Foley, then director of intergovernmental relations and strategic partnerships for the City of Vancouver. The two had both worked in the gender equity space for years and had gotten to know each other through various women in leadership events. Plus, Baikogli Foley had just recently gone through two bouts of maternal leave.

"When Jen reached out with this idea, I said, Yep, absolutely, and we started doing the research. We learned there is very little out there to support mothers during what are the most critical years in a mother's life," Baikogli Foley says. "We started doing our own one-on-one interviews, focus groups, surveys to better understand what is the need and what can we do here to support more mothers."

The pair estimate that some 375,000 women in Canada take maternity leave per year. For those workers, the Motherhood Penalty—the New York Times found in 2014 that women took a 4-percent pay cut for every child they had, while fathers got a 6-percent raise—is no joke.

So Murtagh and Baikogli Foley created Matur and its self-directed eight-module program, which deals with everything from the so-called fourth trimester to the identity shift to an equitable partnership plan and the transition to working. The program also comes with live monthly group coaching sessions, an online community group and guests experts.

It didn't take long to get a founding partner on board: software giant SAP, which Murtagh and Baikogli Foley approached about nine months after conceiving the idea. They got a verbal yes a couple of weeks later, and SAP will roll out the program to its employees in Canada starting on Monday.

"Our minds were blown a bit, but the timing was right, and I think organizations are looking for concrete tools to advance gender equity and inclusion initiatives," Murtagh says. "Further to that, the pandemic further amplified the need to support mothers, who have been disproportionately affected."

There are 70 women on the wait-list for Monday, when Murtagh and Baikogli Foley anticipate that they'll start with about 50. Next year's target for the program is about 1,000 women, a number they think is conservative.

"We want to shift the narrative around maternity leaves in Canada," Baikogli Foley says. "That clarity was brought to me by having children. As tired as you are in those early days, you question everything. What am I here to do?"

Perhaps Murtagh sums it up best: "I always say, you can do no great things, only small things with great love."

**Region:** British Columbia [3]

**Tags:** maternity and parental leave [4]

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