



Gwen Lonigro is the founder of [Brutus and Butch](#), a line of green, vegan, certified organic and natural hair care products for sale online and in select salons. We reached out to hear her story of how she created the company as a way to give back to Gender Spectrum and the LGBT organizations that she supports. We are thankful to Gwen for her generous support!

*Q: What prompted you to start the business?*

A: I started Brutus and Butch after 38 years in the hair care industry in various roles: platform artist, salon owner, mentor, and others. I wasn't ready to retire and needed a new challenge. So starting the product line was both an opportunity to grow and take a risk to see if I could further myself so one day I could step away from behind the chair. I also thought it would serve as an inspiration to women like me — single mothers, first generation immigrant (coming to this country at 6 from Holland and Indonesia), minority woman, women-owned businesses — and teach my then 19 year old son (I raised him alone) to dream.

*Q: What prompted your commitment to Gender Spectrum and other LGBT causes?*

A: It made sense to me in this industry that if I was going to start a hair care line, it needed a reason to exist. It couldn't just be about making money or greed or any other motivations people have sometimes. I wanted to give back to people I've spent a huge chunk of my life with. Not only has the LGBT community contributed so much to my industry, they and I have been hugely influential in each other's lives. I also wanted to include helping young people out. I chose Gender Spectrum because of the work you do with Gender-expansive children, youth and families.

*Q: What's been the most rewarding part of starting a business, and what's been most challenging?*

A: The most rewarding aspect of starting this business has been the appreciation and warm, supportive response from the LGBT community. Mine is one more voice that affirms that they are beautiful as they are and deserve to live as they do without question. The most challenging thing has been getting the product out there on a limited budget (welcome to a dream underfunded!).

*Q: What else should people know about the company and how can they support this work?*

A: What I want people to take away from this company existing is: It's not about us so much as individuals but what we can do for the greater good however we choose to show it. I'm doing this alone in addition to my full time work, so any support makes a huge difference. Purchasing the products contributes to Gender Spectrum and other terrific organizations. Volunteering time or expertise would help too. Whatever each of us does makes a difference.