

JUSTIN MENDOZA

Dedicated spaces for the LGBTQ+ community to access inclusive wellness and psychotherapy are limited.

That's where Justin Mendoza comes in.

In 2020, just two months before the Covid-19 pandemic swept the globe, Mendoza launched Intrinsic Inq. Based in Manayunk, the practice provides LGBTQ+ inclusive psychotherapy in addition to wellness coaching and consulting. A non-binary individual, Mendoza has also increasingly branched into the sober curious movement, educating and providing spaces for those looking to eschew alcohol or who are in recovery.

Mendoza is no stranger to recovery. Now two years sober, their interest in wellness began years ago after working in the fashion industry. A graduate of Philadelphia University – now part of Thomas Jefferson University – Mendoza began their career in fashion, including working for popular menswear designer Paul Frank.

But a pull toward wellness and entrepreneurship shifted that career path.

While living in New York, Mendoza came across the Institute for Integrative Nutrition. After taking classes, they left fashion to pursue wellness, launching health coaching practice Holistic Couture.

Mendoza later rebranded the business as Your Gay Guru and shifted its focus to provide a similar set of services to the LGBTQ+ community.

Working with clients, Mendoza began to notice “barriers out of my scope of practice,” specifically related to mental health. So they earned their degree at Rutgers University to become a licensed clinical social worker. In addition, Mendoza is a certified advanced alcohol and drug counselor and health coach.

“Through the health coaching practice, [I] learned to define my niche ... and really wanting to advocate for the wellness of my community,” Mendoza said. “And with the substance abuse piece, just really



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understanding a lot of the issues and experiences that make wellness for our community challenging in some ways.”

In a report released last year, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration found that gay and bisexual men and women were two to three times more likely to have used illicit drugs, excluding marijuana, in the prior year compared to heterosexual individuals. And about one-third of gay men and bisexual men and women had a sub-

Justin Mendoza is the founder of Intrinsic Inq.

stance use disorder during that time period, a figure that was only slightly lower for lesbian women at 25%.

Mendoza’s practice looks to help address those issues, though they are quick to point out that substance use disorders are not intrinsic to the LGBTQ+ community – and stem from factors including genetics – but can develop “because of societal stigma, negative experiences that we have throughout our life.”

Mendoza was tapped by the Mazzone Center, a Philadelphia nonprof-

it focused on health and wellness for the LGBTQ+ community, to launch its first intensive outpatient substance use program several years ago. That work has carried through to Mendoza’s current practice.

Intrinsic Inq – its spelling is a nod to the queer community – offers psychotherapy in addition to coaching and consulting. Mendoza also works with clients struggling with substance use disorder and is trying to normalize the sober curious lifestyle in which individuals explore sobriety with an alcohol-free month such as Dry January or simply by abstaining on certain occasions.

Last year, Intrinsic Inq was one of 100 business recipients of the Comcast RISE grant, receiving \$5,000 to grow the business. The RISE program is awarded to small businesses advancing diversity, equity and inclusion.

Mendoza’s sober curious programming has included partnerships with zero-proof bar The Volstead by Unity in Manayunk as well as LGBTQ+ meetups.

“I think there’s still stigma around making that choice, even though it’s a healthy choice,” they said.

Mendoza is now looking to grow sober curious programming as part of an overall growth plan for Intrinsic Inq, something they expect to begin this fall and carry into 2025. With a current practice focus on psychotherapy, growth includes adding health coaching and group programming in addition to more sober curious offerings.

“I want to be able to reach more folks, I want to be able to have some lower cost offerings,” they said.

In an extension of their work to uplift the LGBTQ+ community, Mendoza works with the Manayunk Development Corp. on the annual Out and About Festival, which showcases safe spaces for the LGBTQ+ community.

“[Manayunk] is my little corner of Philadelphia that I love, and really want to promote that as well as being an affirming, welcoming community...,” they said.