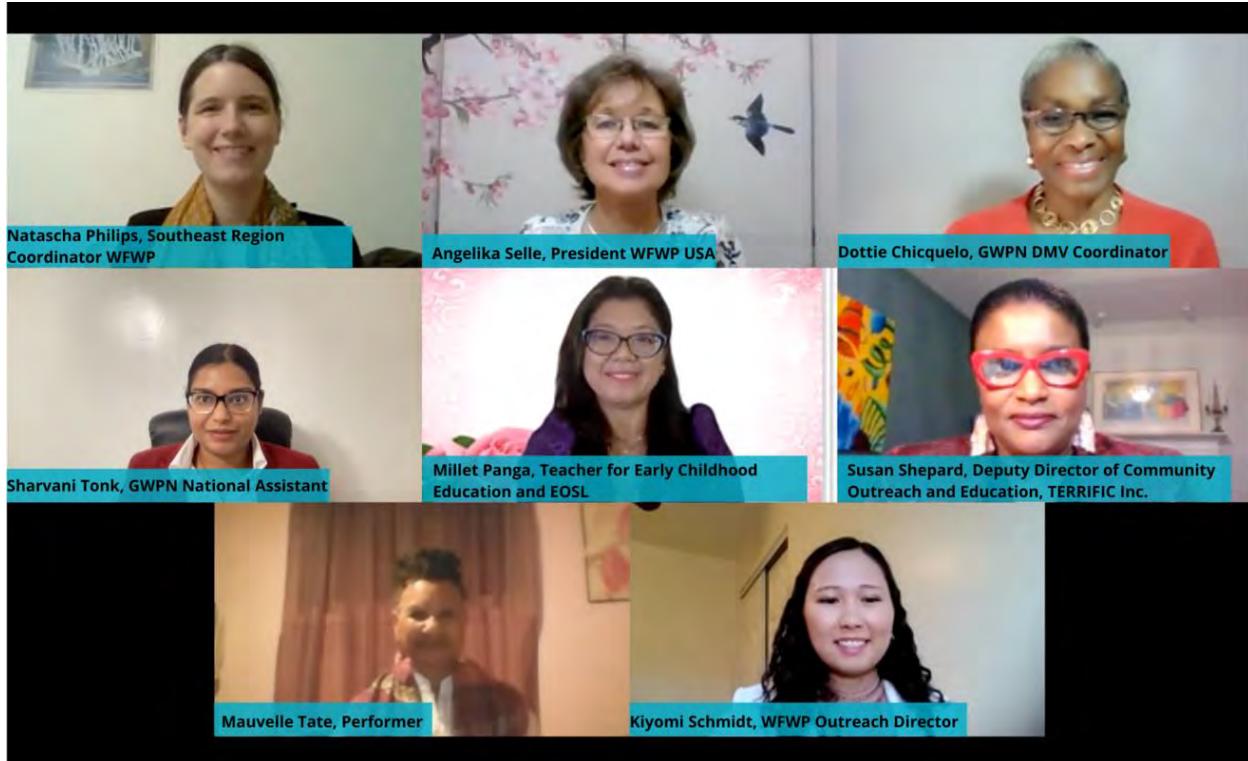


## WFWP USA: Women as the Turning Point for Peace: Life During and After COVID

Natascha Phillips

September 16, 2021



"Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it." — Helen Keller

It has been nearly two years since the Global Women's Peace Network (GWPN) was [launched in the Southeast Region](#) at a hotel in Washington DC in November 2019. It has also been nearly two years since a novel virus struck the people of Wuhan, China and would soon cause unimaginable suffering around the whole world. Countless lives have been lost, businesses upended and education disrupted on a global scale, in a pandemic that still rages on. Accompanying all the tales of misery are the lesser known stories of resilience and adaptability that don't always make the headlines.

Resilience was the key word at the GWPN event "Women as the Turning Point for Peace: Life During and After COVID" that was held on Thursday, September 16, 2021. The virtual program featured two incredible ladies as panel speakers, Romelita "Millet" Panga and Susan McCarley Shepard, who focused their message on resilience in the fields of education and health, respectively.

The fact that the event even took place was a testament to resilience, as it was the first GWPN activity organized by WFWP members in the DMV (DC, Maryland and Virginia) area since the 2019 launch. Natascha Phillips, who recently took on the role of GWPN Coordinator for the Southeast Region, collaborated with GWPN DMV Representative Dottie Chicuelo, Minister Chi Mauuso and Grace Valera to host this event, with the extensive support of the WFWP USA national team.

The program kicked off at 7:30 pm with a warm welcome by Natascha as emcee, followed by some opening remarks from Dottie Chicuelo as the local GWPN representative. Dottie artfully tackled the title of the event, analyzing each word, and concluded with: "We as women are still the turning point and on point as we continue to fight for peace."

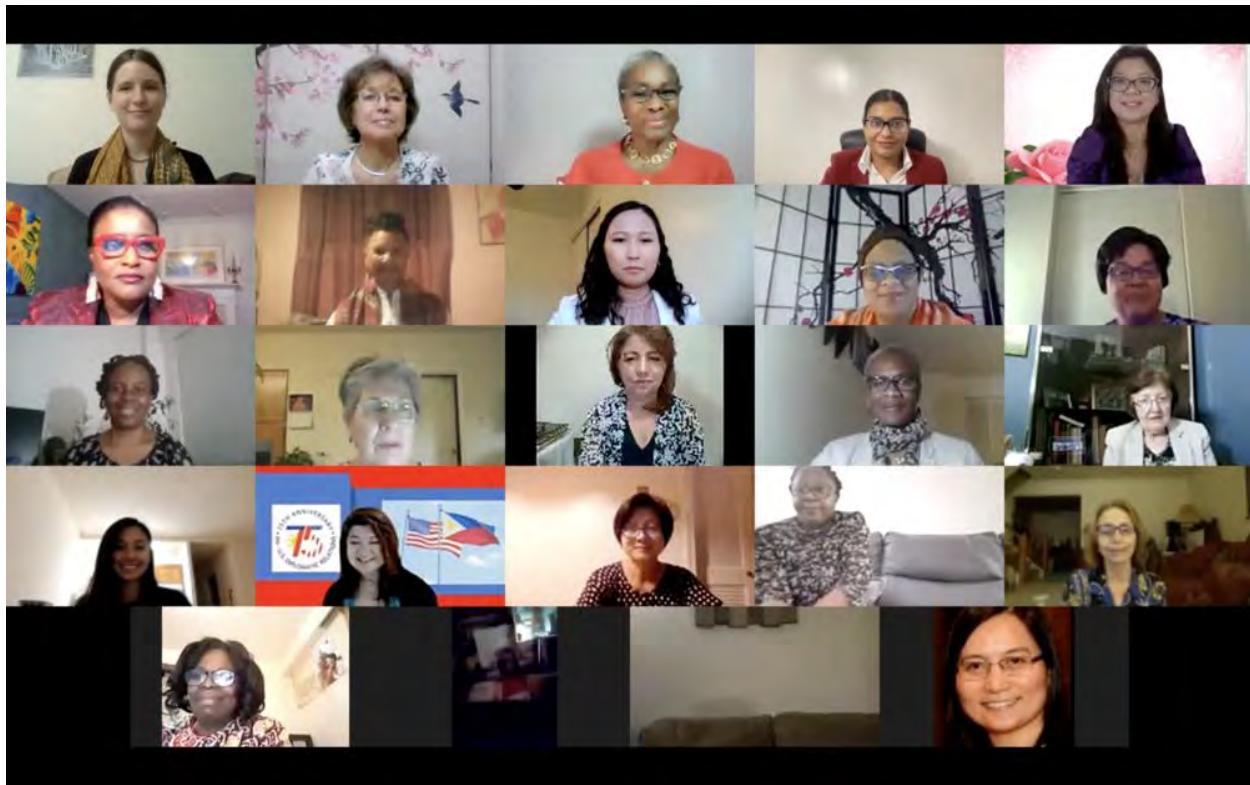
To break the ice and encourage further engagement with the audience, a fun poll was conducted with questions related to life during and after the pandemic. Among the results: more family time was a popular answer to the question of what people did during Covid, and working from home was the number one eye-opening experience for the participants.

WFWP USA President Angelika Selle then offered a comprehensive introduction to the GWPN and its various activities around the nation over the past two years, including five regional launches, the development of a national committee and the Global Friends initiative. Sharing about the online 'Reflect.Reset.Rebuild' series, Angelika proudly said, "Covid did not stop us, ladies! It actually got us going even more, with these monthly online seminars where we had experts coming in — just like we're doing today."

After a beautiful performance of "Let There Be Peace on Earth" by guest singer Mauvelle Tate, Natascha introduced the first panel speaker Millet Panga, a certified educator in Maryland with experience as an

ESOL teacher serving migrant students.

In her talk, entitled "Resilience - The Art of Calm", Millet shared the story of a persistent mother who kept trying until she was able to figure out the new virtual learning platform her son was using for school as a result of the pandemic. This humbling experience brought her to tears: "I gave up. She did not."



Throughout her time teaching virtually since March 2020, and now with the resumption of in-person learning, Millet witnessed "a particular display of calmness amidst the chaos and confusion." She used the acronym CALM (care, adapt, laugh, mindfulness) to share how educators and mothers were able to overcome the challenges of teaching during Covid-19.

"As mothers, we model, practice and teach our families to make peace with uncertainty, not only during a pandemic, but in all circumstances," Millet concluded.

The second speaker was Susan McCarley Shepard, the deputy director of Community Relations and Education Services at [TERRIFIC, Inc.](#), a non-profit housing and human service organization that responds to families in crisis. She has more than 30 years of nonprofit experience working in the areas of HIV education, women and chronically ill individuals.

Susan began her talk, "Still I Rise", with a moment of silence honoring all those who lost their lives to Covid-19. She then presented some interesting health facts about the coronavirus, including the fact that the fatality ratio is 2.4 times higher among men than women. Both physiological and behavioral differences between men and women play a role in vulnerability to Covid-19.

Turning towards the positive impact that women like scientist Dr. Kizzmekia Corbett and medical illustrator Avesta Rastan have had during the pandemic, Susan shared: "From a global perspective, we as women can still be change agents. We can still be decisive leaders at these crossroads."

She ended her presentation with a video clip of the song "Rise Up" by Andra Day, encouraging us all to feel empowered as women and rise up to the challenges we face.

Audience members were invited to ask their questions in an engaging QandA panel, after which Natascha Phillips put a spotlight on the [Global Friends](#) as a way to expand our network by partnering up with like-minded organizations. She also shared the plan for a follow-up meeting on October 1 to form a regional GWPN committee and keep the momentum going.

The evening closed with an upbeat performance of Des'ree's "You Gotta Be" by Mauvelle.