

WFWP USA: Q3: HerStory Award Event

Katarina Connery
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On July 25, 2026 Women Federation for World Peace USA held its third HerStory Award Event of the year. Graciously hosted by Adia Lancaster, GWPN Marketing Manager. Ms. Candice Joe, Dr. Mary Pineda and Ms. Tinuade Akinshola were honored for the amazing work that they do in their communities and the impact of the work is creating ripple effects in the people they serve.

Dr. Katarina welcomed everyone and shared that the event is especially meaningful because it provides an opportunity to hear the inspiring stories of extraordinary women leaders. She reflected that today's world often feels deeply divided, with constant news of suffering, conflict, and hardship leaving many wondering what the future holds for humanity. She then recalled the well-known advice that Mr. Rogers said his mother gave him during difficult times: *"Look for the helpers."* Dr. Katarina remarked that the HerStory Award recipients are among those helpers. They are women who quietly serve others - not seeking recognition or popularity, but responding to the needs they see around them. Moved by compassion, they choose to take action and make a positive difference in the lives of others, offering hope and demonstrating the power of selfless leadership.

The awardees were then introduced through their biographies and invited to share their personal journeys.

Candice Joe, Graduate Student, Arizona State University, began by sharing how growing up in the Navajo Nation shaped her values and approach to leadership. Her family taught her the importance of serving others, respecting elders, and strengthening the community through her actions. Watching people serve others without seeking recognition taught her that true leadership begins with service. These lessons inspired her to combine her passion for public service with advocacy for Indigenous communities.

Through her education and work with organizations supporting Native students, Candice has gained a deeper understanding of both the challenges Indigenous communities face and the strength, resilience, and wisdom within them. Serving as Miss Indigenous ASU has given her the opportunity to encourage young Indigenous students to pursue higher education, embrace their cultural identity, and recognize their

own potential as leaders. She emphasized that meaningful change happens when people work together and build relationships rooted in trust and respect.

Candice accepted the HerStory Award not simply as a personal achievement, but on behalf of her family, mentors, ancestors, and everyone who has supported and encouraged her along the way. She concluded by reminding the audience that *"Leadership is not defined by a title. It is demonstrated through kindness, consistency, and a willingness to serve others each day."*

The second speaker, **Tinuade Akinshola, Licensed Attorney and Human Rights Advocate** shared how growing up in Lagos, Nigeria, in a compassionate and faith-centered family shaped her commitment to serving others. Inspired by her family's care for the poor and vulnerable, she developed a passion for advocating for women and girls and helping them reach their full potential, regardless of their circumstances.

In May 2020, she founded She Rises International, Inc., an organization focused on gender justice, equity, and empowerment in the United States and developing countries. Through mentoring, business development, scholarships, vocational training, maternal support, and feminine hygiene initiatives, the organization creates opportunities for women and girls in communities in the U.S., Uganda, and Nigeria.

Tinuade emphasized that every woman and girl deserves the opportunity to pursue education, become empowered, and fulfill her potential. She expressed gratitude to the many sponsors, board members, mentors, and partners who support this work and concluded with a message of faith and perseverance: *do not allow your circumstances to stop you from rising.*

The third speaker, **Dr. Mary Pineda, Educator and Author**, expressed her heartfelt gratitude for receiving the HerStory Award on the same day she celebrated another significant milestone - virtually receiving her doctorate in education. Reflecting on her journey from the Philippines to the United States, she shared three important lessons. First, she learned that every challenge can become preparation. Her career began in the Philippines, where she discovered her love for science and her passion for helping students believe in themselves. Teaching in the United States expanded her perspective and challenged her professionally. Through setbacks, disappointments, and unexpected changes, she learned resilience and a deeper faith, recognizing that difficult seasons often prepare us for what comes next.

The second lesson she shared is that teaching is not simply a career, but a calling. Her desire to become a better teacher led her to pursue her doctorate and conduct research focused on improving student learning. One experience especially meaningful to her was mentoring students through the NASA HUNCH program, where they worked on authentic problems connected to NASA. The experience reinforced her belief that education goes beyond textbooks and exams - it is about helping young people recognize that their ideas matter, that they belong in science, and that they have the ability to solve problems and make a difference. As educators, she said, we build confidence, open doors, and sometimes change the direction of a student's life without even realizing it.

Her third lesson was that success is measured by impact, not titles. For Dr. Pineda, the greatest accomplishment is knowing that a former student believes in themselves because she first believed in them, or that another teacher has been encouraged through something she shared. Looking ahead, she hopes to continue conducting meaningful educational research, providing professional development, and mentoring educators and students in the Philippines, the United States, and wherever future opportunities lead. She concluded by emphasizing that *education has never been about geography - it has always been about service, and that true success is found in the positive difference we make in the lives of others.*

We congratulate all three awardees for their resilience, impact to community and paving the way for others to follow their dreams.