This issue of Parent Perspectives comes from Monika Wilkinson. Monika began coaching FPS in 1995 as a middle school English teacher. After a 15-year break, she returned to FPS to coach as a parent. Today she coaches three teams at the junior and middle divisions and acts as coordinator for parent-led teams across her community. She works as a middle school academic support specialist at Buckingham Browne and Nichols School, an independent school in Cambridge, MA. Monika lives in Dedham, MA with her husband and three sons (two who are active in FPS and one who plans to be when he reaches grade 4).

Please ENJOY!

It all started with an Underlying Problem!

It started with an Underlying Problem (to use some FPS language): Since FPS did not exist in my local community, how might I, as a mother, increase opportunities for my children to engage in creative problem solving activities so that they could better develop their critical thinking skills as they approached 4th grade in 2012 and beyond?

It turns out, I already knew the best solution.

Fifteen years earlier I had had the good fortune of teaching on Florida’s Space Coast in the town next to Melbourne, Florida—the current home of FPSPI headquarters. I was a young teacher, and my principal asked if I’d coach a middle school team of FPS. I didn’t have a clue what the program was or how to coach, but I didn’t say no. Surrounding schools in the district had well-established programs and seasoned coaches, and the support was strong. Besides, the little I’d heard had been intriguing. I managed to learn enough to lead teams over the next couple of years, and as I did, I fell in love with the six-step process. I also started to care more about topics I hadn’t previously given much thought. Along with the teams I coached, my interest in our future world was growing.

When my own children were nearing 4th grade, I wished that our community had FPS. They were bright and motivated boys who were hungry to think more creatively, to better use their critical thinking skills, to learn more about new subjects, to work more collaboratively with other children, and to experience some academic competition.
I did what other former FPS coaches might do: I decided to start a team. I located the contact information of our FPS state Affiliate Director, and I called her. That same week I recruited three kids to join my son, and a Global Issues Problem Solving team was formed. They didn’t quite know what they were agreeing to try, but I promised snacks and fun, and they jumped aboard.

Four school years later, the first team is still together (still meeting weekly for snacks and fun), and making it to three Affiliate bowls and one International Conference! I’ve now coached five additional teams and supported a dozen parent coaches in my community in leading their own 14 additional teams in those years. Our community now has a small parent-led organization that works independently but in coordination with our local schools.

It’s a success story, but how might I have solved my problem had I not known of FPS? How might I have known what was needed to start a team had I not had the experience as a coach? And what did I wish I knew first about launching a local program?

In 2014 I wrote and was awarded an FPSPI Research and Development grant to develop what I hoped would be a comprehensive collection of materials to generate interest in the program and assist communities in establishing a new local FPS program. The “Toolkit” would be a blueprint and tools for launching a new program when none has previously existed in a town or district. For parents, teachers, or community members interested in bringing the program to the students in a community, I wanted the Toolkit to provide practical guidance to help navigate the earliest steps.

After months of focus groups, interviews with experienced coaches, reviews of similar academic programs, reviews on current materials, and much reflection on my own work in launching and growing a local program, I began to create materials that might assist others in doing the same.

The contents of the collection range from an FAQ sheet, to a sample 36-month timeline for growing a local program, to a questionnaire for prospective FPS-ers, to practical suggestions for recruiting team members, to sample press releases for promotion.

While not yet available for dissemination, these materials will hopefully support parents, teachers, or community members who wish to launch or grow a program in a community. Some of the materials may be useful for those who have more experience with FPS and may be incorporated into existing FPS publications.

It is my deep hope that the materials I created are useful for others, but the process of creating them was an important one for me personally. It allowed me to reflect on the power of this program: the impact it had on me as a coach, the reasons I returned to it many years later for my own children, and the motivation I felt to share it with others.

Sharing FPS with others, letting them know about the program and how they can get involved, might solve a problem for a parent searching for that opportunity for his or her child to think creatively and critically.
Consider ways that you as a parent or supporter of an FPS-er might help others discover FPS.

- Tell others about your experiences with FPS
- Share success stories by helping coaches in writing press releases, using social media, including information in community newsletters
- Use professional networks and civic connections to introduce the program to others who might find ways to support it and get involved
- Know where to refer those who are interested for more information
- Help to organize and assist with information sessions or staff tables at town-wide festivals or events
- Offer creative talents for creating brochures, trifold displays, or other displays for information
- Assist in fundraisers to help raise not only funds but awareness of the Program

We hope you’ll promote the FPSPI program as well! If you have other suggestions for parents promoting the program, please let us hear from you!

“..."The best angle from which to approach a problem is the TRY-angle!"
Author Unknown

We are thankful to all of our parents and coaches that give of themselves to the Future Problem Solving Program International!

The *Parent Perspectives* committee is always looking for contributors. We especially need more testimonials from current or former students, coaches, and participants. Please send all contributions to committee chairperson, Deb Woythal.