This issue of Parent Perspectives comes from Lalitha Nair of the Malaysian affiliate. In this issue, Lalitha chronicles the history of the Malaysian affiliate and emphasizes the vital role PARENTS can play in the success of their children’s participation in Future Problem Solving International. Enjoy!

The Malaysian FPSP - The Difference it made by Taking the Path Less Travelled

The presence and success of Malaysian teams at international competitions over the years is an acknowledgement and recognition of the parents who supported their children and the coaches who mentored them. As such, we see our association with the Future Problem Solving Program International as our contribution to human potential development for the future of Malaysia. The Future Problem Solving Program Malaysia is administered by The Skills Mills Sdn Bhd as a non-profit educational project.

We began our journey with Suzanne Strangward (the National Director of Future Problem Solving Program Australia) in 1998 when she visited Malaysia as a guest of National Association Gifted Children-Malaysia to introduce the program and train coaches. Surprisingly, many were trained but only one, a parent who was a teacher took on the program. She did it for her children, not realising at the time that it would impact others who came in contact with her. Since then, teams from The Skills Mill, Malaysia, have competed in the Future Problem Solving Program in Australia and FPSPI’s International Conference. Besides competition, we have gone on to developing expertise in all components of the program, including Global Issues Problem Solving, Scenario Writing, Scenario Performance and Community Problem Solving.

Small as we may be, we have capped many “achievements and victories” in the spirit of FPS. Our years of competing at the Australian finals to IC were done at a very high cost financially. Amazingly, we are still here, struggling but enjoying the learning experience FPS offers. It would be wonderful to win but given that most of the teams that represent us do not necessarily represent Malaysia’s strongest pool of students. This is so, as very few have the opportunity to participate, because FPS is not offered in schools in Malaysia.

As in many other developing countries around us, education is synonymous to academic achievement and scores. Being such, parents may make choices to go down the conventional path of chasing the paper trail with the hope it will lead to “success” for their children. However, education is more than scores, grades and certificates. We know education should be full of experimentation, enriching experiences and the application of information and knowledge.
In 2001, we were the first Asian team to participate at the IC in Atlanta, which was our first attempt at competition. The highlight of the whole conference for us was the opportunity to meet with the late Dr. E. Paul Torrance (whom many may only have heard about.) Since 2001, when Niranjan Casinader became National Director of FPSP Australia, the long term plans to develop Future Problem Solving in Malaysia took on a renewed focus that was intended to see Malaysia emerge as a full Affiliate of the FPSP International by 2010/2011. From 2000 till 2008, FPSP Malaysia participated competitively at the Australian finals as a mentored region and at FPSP’s International Conference at the recommendation of FPSP Australia.

In 2010 we participated in the first ever Scenario Performance competition offered at the Australian Finals. In 2011 Malaysia became a full Affiliate and member of the Governing Council of the international body (FPSP). At the opening ceremony, the coach and Affiliate Director, Lalitha Nair, received the Daughtrey Award for 2011. The other exciting feature of the year was the first-of-its-kind cross cultural Community Problem Solving (CmPS) project with a FPS team from Decorah, Iowa. This project was presented at IC 2012 at the University of Indiana. In 2012 the late Dr. Rosnah Ismail, a parent and member of FPSP Malaysia committee, received the YES award.

FPSP has touched many people, through exhibitions, talks, training, Facebook and our website. It has also shown us that parents are the force for change. There are many parents out there who have stayed committed to the program for their own as well as their children’s personal development. It is these parents who have helped the program’s presence in Malaysia. Many of the children who started with FPSP Malaysia as youngsters of 8 or 11 years old are now qualified professionals or attending prestigious universities like Imperial College, UK and Stanford University, USA. It was not just because of FPSP, but as one great Indian teacher once told me “Let there be input, the output will work itself.” FPSP has enhanced and enriched our experiences. It developed (to quote a former Malaysian FPSPer) “intangible skills,” like those involved in experimentation, enriching experiences and the application of knowledge.

In 2014 FPSP Malaysia began its journey of mentorship with Thailand. We are thrilled that they are part of the bigger FPS family and that we had a small part in developing this Affiliate. We have also introduced FPS to Indonesia. FPSP Malaysia is also actively involved in many committees through the FPSP Governing Council.

Over the years we at FPSP Malaysia have realised that team and participant numbers matter. However, we are also convinced that numbers do not determine the will or passion to pursue an innovative, amazing approach to education, one that impacts those who decide to choose “the road not taken.” The very fact that we started 16 years ago and are still active speaks for this. Support from government, social ventures groups and the corporate world would go a long way to spur growth but lack of it has not and will not diminish the drive to move forward.

2016 has started on a positive note and we hope to see even more involvement from relevant parties leading to more children benefitting by being a part of FPSP Malaysia. We are calling all parents, particularly our fellow Malaysian parents, to take the first step to discover FPSP for their children.

(The title of this article was adapted from The Road Not Taken, by Robert Frost.)
Participants from Malaysia at recent International Conferences!

Did you guess all the locations from our photos of traditional Christmas Foods in the last newsletter?
Below are the correct answers:
1. Portugal
2. Malaysia
3. England/ United Kingdom
4. Turkey
5. Switzerland
6. Alaska
7. India
8. Louisiana
9. New Zealand

We Wish Each Affiliate Much Success in ...

Calling all FPS Alumni, Parents, Evaluators, Current Students and Affiliate Directors!
Our annual Testimonial edition of Parent Perspectives is coming in April. Please consider documenting your personal FPS experiences and sharing them with us! We are especially seeking submissions from Alumni to inform us of “where they are now” and “how FPS affected their career or field of study.”

Please submit all testimonials by April 1, 2016 to: lisa_quintana4@yahoo.com or april@fpspi.org or dwoythal@gmail.com or rogers.cyd2@gmail.com

PARENTS!
*On what FPS topics or procedures do you need more information or details?
*Do you have ideas for future issues of Parent Perspectives?
*Do you know a potential donor for your affiliate program or the international program?
Please send all questions, ideas and suggestions to: dwoythal@gmail.com or april@fpspi.org