Participating in Future Problem Solving teaches all of us powerful, useful, and life-long learning skills. When rumors of a pandemic sprang up, I was the eternal optimist. I remember thinking, “Oh it will never grow to be such a global issue.” Boy was I wrong! The last five months have been boring, lonely, full of long work hours, incredibly inspiring, and even frightening at times. Each Affiliate Director had to make very tough decisions about hosting a live or virtual Affiliate Bowl. We had to communicate with our coaches, parents, and students in innovative and new ways. We had to design new formats for competitions while learning to work even more collaboratively and creatively.

Next, the International Office also showed their creative resolve! They showed the world that Future Problem Solvers never quit, and we have the problem solving skills to serve our students, their schools, and one another! I have been impressed and so inspired that the Future Problem Solving Programs across the globe showed such strength, creativity, and grit! In times where other academic competitions either simply cancelled their events or held modified competitive events, our program made it happen! Our 2020 Virtual International Competition was held with integrity, rigor, and extreme attention to detail to ensure that our participants had as much of a total International Conference experience as possible.

I have never been so proud to be a part of the Future Problem Solving International Program! I would like to take this opportunity to thank April Michele, and our entire international office staff for their perseverance, patience, thoughtful planning, and panache! Well done FPSPI!

Did you know that three of our affiliates are celebrating their 40th anniversary in 2020? Please join me in congratulating the Illinois Affiliate, the Minnesota Affiliate and the Texas Affiliate for reaching this impressive milestone! Congrats!

Cyd Rogers, Texas AD
A wave of nostalgia hit me when I learned my daughter’s elementary school teacher had invited her to participate in a “new” program called Future Problem Solving. Thirty years ago, I had participated in FPS as a middle and high school student in West Virginia. My team attended the International Conference twice. While I was in college and graduate school, I evaluated booklets for WV FPS, and I continue to exchange Christmas cards with my Middle Division FPS Coach. So, I was thrilled when Mrs. Farr introduced Future Problem Solving to Bekah and her classmates.

With Mrs. Farr’s outstanding coaching, Bekah and her teammates excelled at FPS. However, when they reached middle school, the school resources were not available to support FPS. Mrs. Farr willingly agreed to continue to coach the team, but as parents, we recognized the additional burden that was for her. So, this past year, I offered to coach both the team and one individual competitor.

Being a parent-coach for FPS was a true gift in so many ways. I was able to arrange my work schedule so that each Wednesday I could pick up the students from school and bring them to our house for practice. I learned more about Middle School daily life during the ten-minute ride home from school than I learned the entire rest of the week! After a snack (no matter how much food we put out, they always ate it all), we spent an hour or so working on the FPS steps, learning vocabulary, discussing articles and videos, practicing with sample future scenes, trying to understand evaluator comments on their booklets, and generally having a lot of fun. Due to their hard work, both the team and our individual competitor were able to compete in this year’s virtual International Bowl.

If you find yourself in the same situation as our team, I hope that you will consider being a Future Problem Solving coach. If so, I would suggest:

1. Ask your child’s permission - It worked well for us, but I am not sure that is the case for every parent and child.
2. Use available resources - Georgia FPS sponsored a 1-day training session for new coaches that was invaluable as the booklet and terminology had changed from when I was in high school; talk to other FPS coaches and take their advice on how to structure practices, find resources, etc.; and buy the Readings, Research, and Resources (RRR) from FPSPI.
3. Be willing to learn something new - While I initially reviewed materials and searched the internet to find appropriate resources to share with the students, with each topic, I quickly recognized my own lack of knowledge and desire to know more.

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I am glad to have had the chance to help Bekah and her teammates continue with FPS with energy, dedication, imagination, and commitment. As the program did for me, I know that FPS will change their lives forever, and through them change the world. Plus, someday I may get some new Christmas cards.

Note: This coach and team transitioned to Zoom online meetings in March 2020. Mr. Rich suggests a parent needs to become familiar with the teleconferencing technology first. He observed that the most challenging part was when all team members started talking at the same time, but isn’t that typical for excited, passionate FPSers wherever they are???

The FPS virtual IC was truly a fun and exciting adventure! Out of lemons, the FPS team created delicious, sparkling lemonade. My favorite part of the FPS International Conference is the CmPS Showcase. This summer, I was delighted to jump into the virtual CmPS Showcase space where I could view other projects’ documentation and media presentations. I got to see the inspiring work of student leaders from around the globe.

Not only did I enjoy the CmPS Showcase, but I also loved exploring the virtual space while picking up mementos from each state. The best part of the virtual IC was how interactive it was. Being able to walk around the space and find mementos - such as the Hollywood sign for California or the corn for Iowa - made the experience very engaging and exciting, because I couldn’t wait to collect them all. Another terrific feature was the avatar; I liked that there was a myriad of choices, including all heritages and styles. With my chosen avatar, I spent hours going to various explorations zones to collect mementos and meet other problem solvers. Even though a global pandemic prevented FPS-ers from meeting in person, the FPS spirit was not broken. The FPS IC of 2020 is sure to be one I will remember and cherish for the rest of my life!

Shirley Zhu, Bellaire HS

Shirley Zhu is a rising senior at Bellaire High School in Houston, Texas. Shirley and her twin sister, Annie, started an FPS club at their school and the girls serve as the coaches and participate in GIPS, CmPS, Scenario Writing, and Scenario Performance!

When the world gives you lemons... FPSPI makes sparkling lemonade!