

Hope for a Better Future
by Jael Mbadu, age 14, Portland

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As I stood on the rocky shore of Portland, Maine, I couldn't ignore the changes. The ocean, once serene, now seemed darker and angrier. The air was warmer than it should be for late June, and the familiar scent of saltwater had a strange, metallic odor. As a kid growing up in the late 2000s, I had a deep love for the ocean. My friends and I spent countless summers swimming, riding our bikes, and playing basketball. But now, the rising sea levels had swallowed parts of our favorite beach and marine life was dwindling. My friends and I joined a local environmental group, hoping to make a difference. We organized beach cleanups, planted trees, and educated our community about reducing our carbon footprint. It was hard work, but I felt a sense of purpose.

One evening, after a long day of canvassing, I sat on the porch with my grandma. "Do you think we'll ever be able to fix this?" I asked. She looked at me with a mixture of sadness and hope.

"I don't know. But every little bit helps. We can't give up." Her words stayed with me.

Over the next few months, we collaborated with other groups, raised funds, and got the local government to implement stricter environmental regulations. Slowly, we started to see changes. The beaches were cleaner, the air felt fresher, and there was a renewed sense of community. It wasn't a huge change, but we were finally taking accountability.

One day, I saw kids playing basketball near the water's edge, reminding me of simpler times. I smiled, knowing that while we still had a long way to go, we were making progress.

In the face of climate change, it's easy to feel powerless, but I learned that even the smallest actions could create ripples of change. And as long as we kept fighting, there was hope for a better future.