SOCIAL ISSUE:
Racism

Causes and Research
Makayla has been going to protests since before she was born. Her mother marched to protest the death penalty when she was 9 months pregnant with Makayla. Makayla grew up listening and learning from her parents. She learned that 95% of US police departments arrest black people at a higher rate than any other racial group.

When Makayla was 15 years old, she went to debate camp. She learned how to argue using facts and to convince people using her Freedom of Speech. Makayla went to debates and met students from other schools. She noticed some schools have a lot more money than others. Research shows less money is spent on students in schools where the majority of the kids are Black or Latino. Makayla decided to take her new skills outside of the debate room and into the real world. She wanted to make change happen, not just talk about it.

Goals and Obstacles
Makayla knows that making change is hard work. She wants all people, no matter what their race, to be treated fairly by the police and by the courts. She also wants schools to be better funded and for them to appreciate students’ diversity and voices. These goals sound like something everyone can agree on. Sadly the biggest obstacle Makayla faces is trying to convince people to care about these issues. Many people think racism does not exist and things are fine the way they are.
Actions

Makayla’s first action was a protest against police violence. In 2015, Freddie Gray, a Black man, died of injuries while in police custody in Baltimore. His death was ruled a homicide by the medical examiner, supporting what many eyewitnesses claimed—that police used excessive force during Gray’s arrest. Days of organized protests followed, with some ending in violent clashes with police. Makayla wanted to make sure the police would not use force against peaceful protesters—mostly citizens and members of anti-racism organizations like Black Lives Matter. She sent letters and requested a meeting with the mayor. When the mayor did not respond, Makayla and 15 other young people used their Freedom of Assembly. They sat inside City Hall until the mayor agreed to talk with them. They wanted a promise that police would treat peaceful protesters fairly, and that the community would have input in the hiring of a new police commissioner.

Makayla also created a group called City Bloc at her high school. The group plans events to improve their school and protest things they think are unfair. When the school made plans to have police officers with guns stationed in the building, Makayla and other students organized a walkout. Makayla also planned a protest called Formation Week. The students at her school were upset about the dress code. There was a new rule saying that any student who was not Muslim was not allowed to wear a headscarf. This rule ignored the fact that women in lots of cultures, especially African and African American cultures, wear headscarves. During Formation Week, students were encouraged to wear clothes that celebrated their culture and identity. On Mindwrap Monday, everyone wore colorful head wraps and scarves to protest the new rule.

Impact

Makayla’s actions have already had an impact in Baltimore. She retweeted racist comments made on Twitter by a Baltimore police officer and showed the world what he was saying. As a result, he was fired from his patrol job and put on overnight security duty. The Baltimore City police also made a new social media policy, which punishes any police officers if they make racist, sexist, or inappropriate comments online. Makayla inspires young people to find the courage to take action!

“Having courage is not having the absence of that fear. It’s just the motivation and the ability to see what you are fighting for outweighs that fear.”

— Makayla Gilliam-Price