

# Mari Copeny Takes Action to Save Her City

By: Caitlyn Meagher

*Adapted by Fishtank Staff*



Mari Copeny

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- 1 Individuals of all ages can make huge impacts in their community. Mari Copeny is one great example. She is taking action to help her community of Flint, Michigan. She is a young activist who has spent many years speaking out against environmental injustice.
- 2 In 2014, the water in Flint, Michigan started to look and taste unusual. Some people in Flint began getting skin rashes. Some people's hair started falling out.
- 3 These symptoms were all caused by toxic water. To save money, the Michigan state government had decided to stop transporting clean, treated water from Detroit to Flint. Instead, the government started getting the city's water from the polluted Flint River. This new water source was not treated to get rid of toxins. Plus, this polluted water travelled through old pipes on its way to people's homes. It became contaminated by lead, a toxic metal, and harmful bacteria. People began speaking out about their water quality, but the government did not take action. Soon, researchers and doctors began looking into this issue. City tests of the water showed high lead levels. Doctors looked over children's medical records. They realized Flint children had

higher lead levels in their blood than children in other U.S. cities. High lead levels can affect how children's brains develop. This can lead to many different health problems, including learning disorders, behavioral issues, hearing loss, and more. The water in Flint was so toxic that people had to stop drinking it. Some people couldn't take showers or baths in the water without irritating their skin. They had to use bottled water for all of their water needs.

- 4 Mari Copeny had grown up in Flint. She saw how the toxic water was affecting her community and wanted to take action to help. In 2016, 8-year-old Copeny wrote a letter to Barack Obama, the U.S. president at the time. She told him about Flint's water problems. Obama got her letter and visited Flint. His visit helped raise awareness for the issue. People around the country began donating to Flint. Obama also later approved \$100 million to upgrade Flint's water system.
- 5 But Mari Copeny did not stop there. She continued to raise money so everyone in her city could get free bottled water. Her efforts over the years have raised more than \$500,000. To this day, many people of Flint still cannot use their tap water. However, because of pressure from activists like Copeny, the government of Flint is slowly replacing its old lead water pipes.
- 6 Copeny wants everyone to have access to safe, clean water. She continues to raise money for Flint and other U.S. cities that do not have easy access to clean water. She also partnered with a company to create her own water filter. These filters have been shipped all across the country to people facing toxic water issues. She even started a letter writing project where people across the world send letters of encouragement and inspiration to Flint kids. Thousands of letters have arrived so far.
- 7 Copeny believes more people should take action to fix local issues. As soon as she is old enough, she plans on running for president. She has experienced firsthand how much power each individual has to change the world. She says, "If they don't give you a seat at the table, stand on it with a megaphone." Her confidence and commitment to this cause have inspired many others to join the fight for equal access to clean water.