

Open-Source Hasn't Solved Ageing (And That's Okay! Mistakes Happen)

Built by OpenRockets & teenagers aged 11 to 16, MAPLE is our attempt to create the world's first open-source software license for kids, giving them high authority over their intellectual property.



YEUK FEI H. (OPENROCKETS), TANISH SINGLA (OPENROCKETS), NESAPRIYAN E (OPENROCKETS), AND MAPLE
LICENSE FOR MINORS
34 MINUTES AGO



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Open Source Has an Age Problem.

Every day, teenagers write software, publish research, build open-source projects, create designs, organize technical communities, and contribute work that can travel much further than the bedroom, classroom, library, refugee camp, or school computer where it was created. The technology works. The internet works. Git works. GitHub works. Open source works. Then the young creator reaches the point where the system stops being about writing code and starts becoming about legal agreements, intellectual property transactions, delegations of rights, institutions, companies, and the adults legally expected to participate around them. **That is where the system changes.**

We are a group of teenagers between the ages of 11 and 16 working through Scientific Teenager by OpenRockets Inc. For months, we have been working around one mission: protecting minors' intellectual property and preventing young creators from losing access to or rights over what they create, while preserving the beauty and openness of open-source science. The project we believe can move that mission forward is **OpenRockets MAPLE 1.0**, the **Minor Authors' Public License for Expression**. Our goal is ambitious. MAPLE is designed to become the world's first open-source software license dedicated to minor authors and to become indexable on the Linux Foundation's SPDX License List, the industry-standard software license list. We do not think the software world needs another license because there are not enough licenses. **We think it needs MAPLE because an entire category of creators has never had a license designed around them.**

The Missing Layer

Most of the infrastructure surrounding open-source software quietly assumes something about the person using it. It assumes that when legal participation becomes necessary, the correct adult exists, that adult is available, that adult understands the technology, that adult supports what the child is doing, and

that the relationship between that child and that adult is healthy enough for participation to happen. For millions of young people, those assumptions can fail. When legal agreements with institutions or companies, intellectual property transactions, or delegations of rights require parental participation behalf of a minor, the technical quality of what that young person created can suddenly become almost irrelevant.

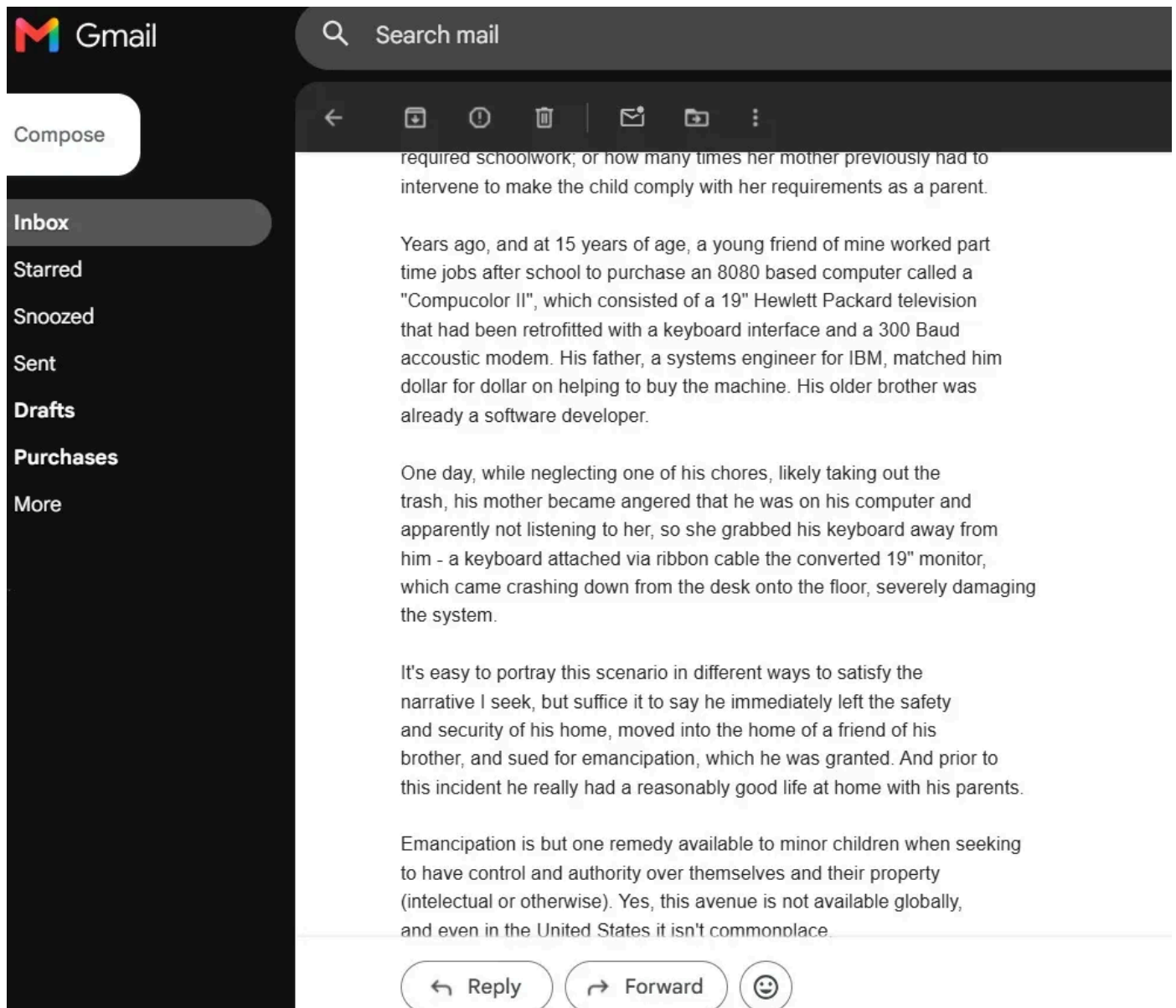
The code can be brilliant. The project can work. The repository can exist. The young person can understand every line they wrote. But the next stage can depend on circumstances completely unrelated to the work itself. We call this **friction**. Friction sounds harmless until you understand who experiences it, because something that appears to be a minor procedural inconvenience can become the point where a young creator simply cannot move forward.

The Reality of Human Ambition



Sometimes the clearest way to understand this problem is to look at what young people continue to build when the assumptions around an ordinary childhood disappear. United Nations Refugee Agency documented the story of **Remy Gakwaya**, who fled Burundi at the age of 15 after his parents were killed in ethnic clashes. He eventually reached the Dzaleka refugee camp in Malawi, learned programming, and founded TakeNoLab to teach other refugees coding and application development. Resources were so limited that some students

practiced using printed images of computer keyboards because there were not enough computers, while power cuts sometimes meant classes continued in the dark. Remy's story matters because it demonstrates something fundamental: **human ambition does not wait for ideal circumstances.** A young person can live in almost every form of instability around them and still continue creating, learning and building.

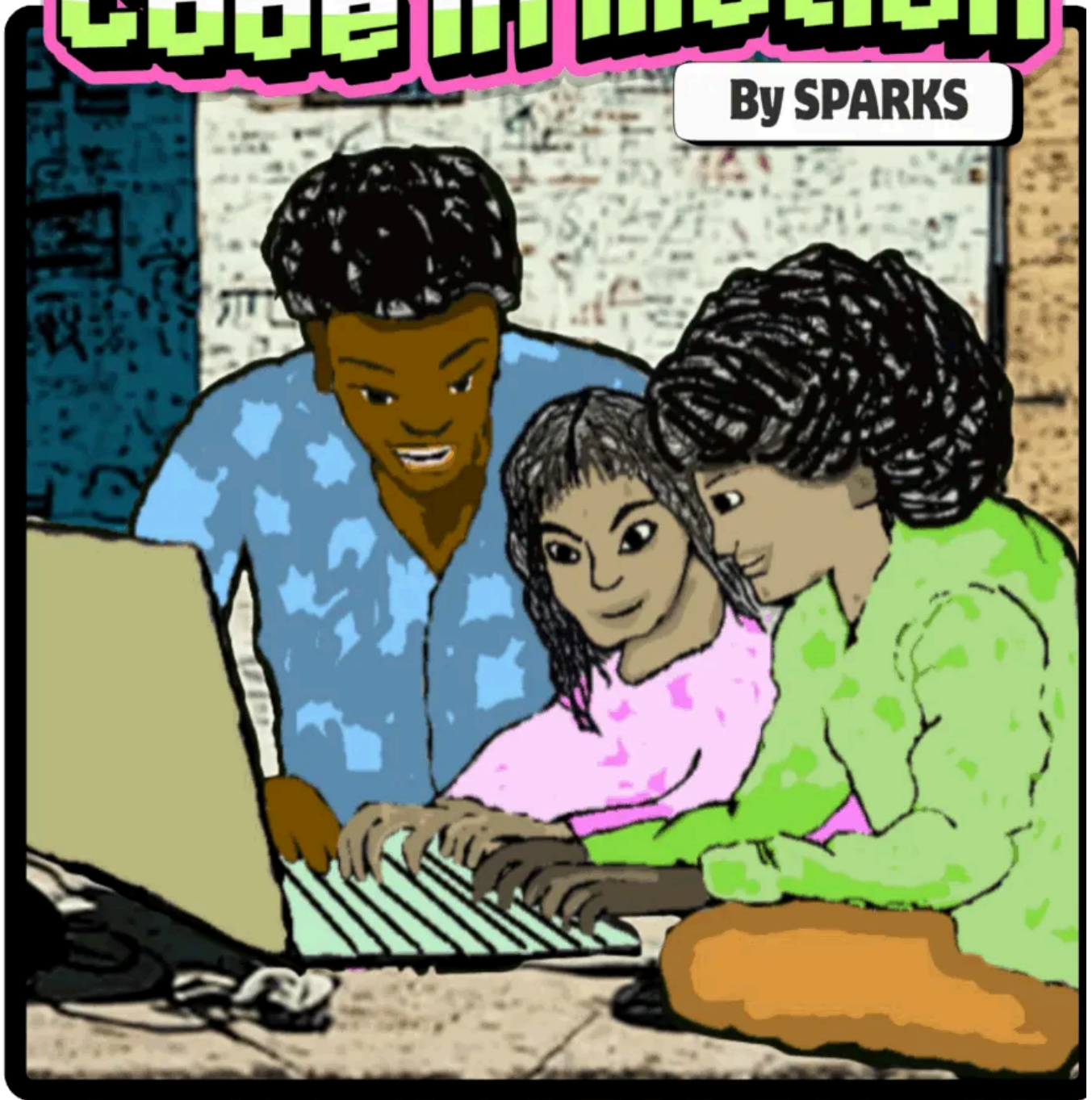


But the same underlying problem does not only appear in refugee camps or extreme circumstances. A senior software engineer who later worked across

major technology and engineering companies wrote to us about his own experience as a teenager. At 15, he worked part-time after school to save for a 8080-based computer called a Compucolor II. His father, a systems engineer IBM, matched his savings dollar for dollar, and his older brother was already software developer. One day, after an argument over a household chore, his mother grabbed the keyboard connected to the machine. Because the keyboard was attached by a ribbon cable to the converted 19-inch monitor, the computer came crashing from the desk onto the floor and was severely damaged. He told us that he subsequently left home, moved in with a friend of his brother, and successfully pursued legal emancipation. Before that incident, by his own account, he had lived a reasonably good life with his parents.

Code in Motion

By SPARKS



That story is important precisely because it is not a story about an obviously broken household. A supportive father had helped him buy the computer. His brother was already in software. He had a home. He had access to technology

And yet, in a single moment, circumstances completely unrelated to the quality or legitimacy of what he was building changed his relationship with the tools and property behind his work. His eventual route was emancipation, a legal mechanism that can give some minors greater authority over themselves and their property. But emancipation is not globally available, and even where it exists, it is hardly an ordinary or realistic path for most young creators. The point is not that every young developer will experience something this dramatic. The point is that **systems built around the assumption that the correct adult will always be available, supportive, and capable of acting in a young creator's interests are making an assumption that reality cannot guarantee.**

WAIT. What happens to the child who does not have reliable family support? What happens to the young programmer without a stable home? What happens to the teenager creating software inside a refugee camp? What happens to the student using a school computer because there is no computer waiting at home? What happens when the person legally expected to participate in protecting or managing a young creator's work is also the person restricting their access to that work? We recently spoke with a student connected to Ash Trust in Kanpur, India, who is organizing a hackathon using infrastructure provided by OpenRockets. He spoke to us about what it feels like to be alone as a kid. These are not theoretical edge cases to us.

In the United States, about **1,540,000 school-aged students are homeless.** Globally, about **150,000,000 minors are homeless.** More than **273,000,000 minors are either abandoned or subjected to severe parental negligence.** Now put those numbers beside a system that can require the participation of the right adult when a minor reaches important legal interactions involving what they created. That is why we refuse to dismiss this as a small inconvenience. **The inconvenience can become the barrier.**

Open-Source Did Not Solve Age. And That's Okay! Mistakes Happen.



One of the beautiful things about open source is that geography matters less. A teenager in Sri Lanka can publish code that someone in California uses. A student in India can collaborate with someone in New York. A young developer who has never entered a corporate office can build something used by people they will never meet. Open source broke down enormous barriers to participation. But there is still an age boundary hidden underneath that openness.

The modern open-source ecosystem has spent decades developing licenses to define permissions, restrictions, attribution, redistribution, modification, patents, compatibility, and countless other questions. Those licenses are extraordinarily important. But none of that means the particular realities of minor authorship disappear. **That is the missing layer we are trying to build.** MAPLE is not an attempt to pull minors away from open source. MAPLE exists because we want minors to participate in open source more safely, more confidently, and with infrastructure that recognizes that the author on the other side of a repository might be thirteen years old. We believe that if minors

are already building the future of software, the licensing infrastructure of software must eventually acknowledge that they exist.

Why MAPLE



MAPLE stands for the **Minor Authors' Public License for Expression**. Our goal is to create an open-source license specifically designed around minor authors. We want MAPLE 1.0 to become indexable on the Linux Foundation's SPDX License List. We want to reach a stage where major software platforms can recognize it. We want to eventually be able to approach platforms such as GitHub and say that minor authorship should not remain an invisible edge case inside infrastructure used by millions of developers. Ultimately, we want a

young person creating something important to have an option designed with people like them in mind.

There is a reason we chose licensing as the place to attack this problem. **A license travels with the work. A license can be recognized by infrastructure. A license can become standardized. A license can appear inside development tools. A license can become something developers, organizations, institutions, lawyers, and platforms learn to recognize.** The problem should not have to be rediscovered from zero every single time another thirteen-year-old creates something valuable. The infrastructure should already be there. That is what we are trying to build.

This Is Not a School Project

We need to make something very clear. We are not doing this for a medal. We are not entering MAPLE into a competition. We are not trying to complete another IB project. We are not building something so that we can put a certificate on a wall and move on. We are trying to establish something we believe should continue existing after we grow up. If MAPLE succeeds, the people who benefit most from it may be children we will never meet. **That is point.**

We have no formal backing. There is no giant institution behind this campaign. There is no enormous marketing budget. There is no organization capable of simply declaring that this matters and forcing the technology industry to pay attention. Right now, there are teenagers working on it, and there are people reading this. **That is what we have.**

More Than 18,000 People Are Receiving What you are Reading Right Now.

Our Substack now has more than **18,000 subscribers**. So we want to ask you to imagine something. Imagine if only one percent of the people receiving this decided that this problem was worth supporting. That is 180 people. For an established movement, 180 people might look small. For something at our stage, it can change the conversation. When we eventually approach people in Silicon Valley, open-source communities, standards organizations, lawyers, researchers, and platforms such as GitHub, one of the most important things need to prove is very simple: **other people believe this needs to exist too**.

That is why we are asking you to do something incredibly small. If you use X, formerly Twitter, follow [@MAPLElicense](#). That is our main request. Not money. Not a donation. Not a subscription. **A follow**. If you agree with something we publish, like it. If you think another developer should see it, repost it. If you disagree with us, quote it and tell us why. Visibility matters because eventually this idea has to reach people with the ability to help turn it from a project created by teenagers into infrastructure recognized by the software world. If you do not use X, sign our petition at [Change.org/LicenseU18](#). There are about 100 signatures right now. Your name will not disappear inside a petition containing millions of signatures. At this stage, every signature materially changes what we can show when we say that people want this problem addressed.

If You Are an Adult, Help Us Build This Right



MAPLE is being built by teenagers, but we do not believe teenagers should be something this important inside an echo chamber. If you are an adult with experience in technology, open source, software development, law, education research, nonprofit work, product development, policy, or simply years of experience inside the technology world, **we would like you to consider joining the OpenRockets MAPLE Advisory Board.** You do not need a particular degree, job title, university background, or professional certification. You do not need to be a lawyer. You do not need to be an executive. If you understand open source, care about young creators, and believe your experience could help us make better decisions, that is already valuable to us.

As an advisor, your role is to **guide us, question us, challenge our assumptions, share what you have learned, point out what we are missing, and help us think more carefully before we make important decisions.** Talk with us. Ask difficult questions. Tell us when an idea does not make sense. Help us understand how the software industry actually works. Help us understand how developers, companies, institutions, open-source communities, and the people who maintain the infrastructure we use may respond to what we are building. We

want MAPLE to remain a project led by young people, but strengthened by adults who are willing to give those young people the benefit of experience.

If you would like to become an advisor, please fill out the form at OpenRockets.com/join and mention that you are interested in joining the **MAPLE Advisory Board**. You can also contact us directly at opensource@openrockets.com. We will try to respond within **one to three days** and, where appropriate, invite you into our [Discord](#) and [Slack](#) communities so you can speak directly with the teenagers working on MAPLE.

Advisors who contribute their time and knowledge to the project will also be able to receive an **official letter of gratitude and involvement from OpenRock** recognizing their advisory service and contribution to our nonprofit community. But more importantly, you will have the opportunity to help a group of young people think more clearly, avoid mistakes, understand industries they have not yet had decades to experience, and build something that we hope will eventually outlive all of us.

What We Want to See One Day

Our goal can ultimately be reduced to one very simple image. A child somewhere opens GitHub. Maybe they are eleven. Maybe they are thirteen. Maybe they are sixteen. Maybe they are sitting inside a comfortable home with two supportive parents. Maybe they are sitting inside a rural school. Maybe their computer belongs to somebody else. Maybe they have no idea where they will be living next year. None of that changes what appears on the screen. They create a repository, open **Choose a license**, and there, alongside licenses recognized throughout the software world, they see: **OpenRockets MAPLE 1.0 Universal**.

That is the future we are trying to build, and we need enough people behind the idea to get there. If you believe minors belong in the future of open source, do not just agree with this article and close the tab. Follow [@MAPLElicense](#). If you do not use X, sign [Change.org/LicenseU18](#). If you know somebody in open source, intellectual property, software infrastructure, technology policy, or Silicon Valley who needs to see this, send this article to them. You can read our essay **Why Is It So Easy to Ignore?** at [openrockets.com/research/maple/v1](#), and you can also read TechCity's coverage, [OpenRockets: Continuity and Protection of the Intellectual Property of Minors](#).

Subscribe to OpenRockets MAPLE Open-Source Software License for Minors

Launched 4 days ago

We are creating the world's first SPDX-indexable open source software license dedicated to protecting the intellectual property of minors. By OpenRockets.com

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