As part of our Introducing Faith interview for the Youth Matters Newsletter, Faith told us about her trip to Uganda in Africa:

My mum inspires my sister and I to grab any opportunity...

so when she heard of this trip through her church, for teenagers to visit Uganda for two weeks, we were quickly interested. We went to a few meetings, just talking about it, bearing in mind we didn't know anyone else, so we were going in like fresh faces! We made friends quickly, but it did feel scary because it was a big leap of my comfort zone.

The trip involved two weeks moving between different hotels and we also stayed with two host families for three nights, each in different areas, travelling across Uganda. It was an intense experience, but it was something I knew I was ready for, after my first year at University my confidence had increased, I was a bit more settled around myself and my place in my life and I felt like I needed something to do something over the summer!

We went to four or five different secondary schools and that was lovely because I got to meet so many more young people. At nights we stayed in the host house, where I would be sharing a bedroom with my sister and another lady from the from the church. This was difficult because usually every day I like to have an escape, reading a book or just some space and I couldn't even go to the bathroom alone because the bathroom had no running water, and the door wouldn't shut! So, me and my sister would go together, I mean, it was certainly a bonding experience for me and my sister! Stressful as it may be, I mean, I cried quite a few times I think because I was so burnt out in the sense our schedules were so packed, and I didn't have my own space.

We would start the day at 7:00am, get on the bus to whichever destination, and we wouldn't go to sleep until 10 PM or 11:00 PM. There wasn't much Wi-Fi so I couldn't even contact my mum. **It was a difficult process and the only way I got through that was literally thinking about the next step and minimise the next step.** So, I would think what are we doing tomorrow and some days just or get through from one meal to the next. I would look forward to mealtimes because that's when everyone relaxed a bit more, meals are a big social thing so I would constantly look to the next meal when I knew things would slow down, even a little. We did stay in some hotels where everyone was in the pool and playing games and I just stayed in my room because I needed the alone time.

Me and all the other teenagers were just so exhausted, but we often found the funny side! We would all be barely awake but start laughing our heads off, when for example, one night we had a thunderstorm and we were all really scared because we'd never heard thunder that loud, but then we just started laughing because you wouldn't have this much rain or the intensity of the downpour in England, you know, it's Africa! So, **I learnt that the trick is to find the little happiness, the little joys in even in the bad moments.**

I'd like to credit my mum for inspiring me and being selfless. On this trip, a lot of the teenagers went with one or both parents. When I asked Mum 'Why don't you come with us'? She said, 'I've had my time in Africa. I did my degree in Africa and it taught me a lot about myself. I want you and your sister to go and have this journey by yourselves, and I want you to experience this and learn about yourself without me, to grow in your own way. I want this adventure just to be the two of you, to bond together'. I felt grateful, it means a lot to have a supportive family unit.

I think the reason I have come so far is because since primary school my mum has taught me through her actions, making all my EHCP's, going to all these meetings and emailing all my teachers. She showed me how to advocate for myself because she was very determined to get me support, access arrangements etc. She was very much the voice for me for so many years and so, when I finally got to university, it was very much that I had to do a lot more alone. Student finances and DSA, which you have to do individually, was very difficult and scary, but now university have given me a laptop printer and all of the years of my mum fighting for me have helped me to now advocate for myself.

Mum has given me many things that she doesn't know because I've just been watching. **What I have learned from reflecting on this whole journey, especially my trip to Africa, was that young people have a voice.** But not only do we have a voice remember that regardless of who's listening, someone is. Whether it's the local authority or university or peers! I used to think, no one could hear my voice, I was such an introvert, but I really want to inspire young people, and I'd love to do more talking and help in any way. But yes, my lesson is remembering that your voice will be heard regardless. I mean, it might be ignored for a few years, but someone will hear! And so just **speak any way you can because someone will hear it eventually and someone will listen.**