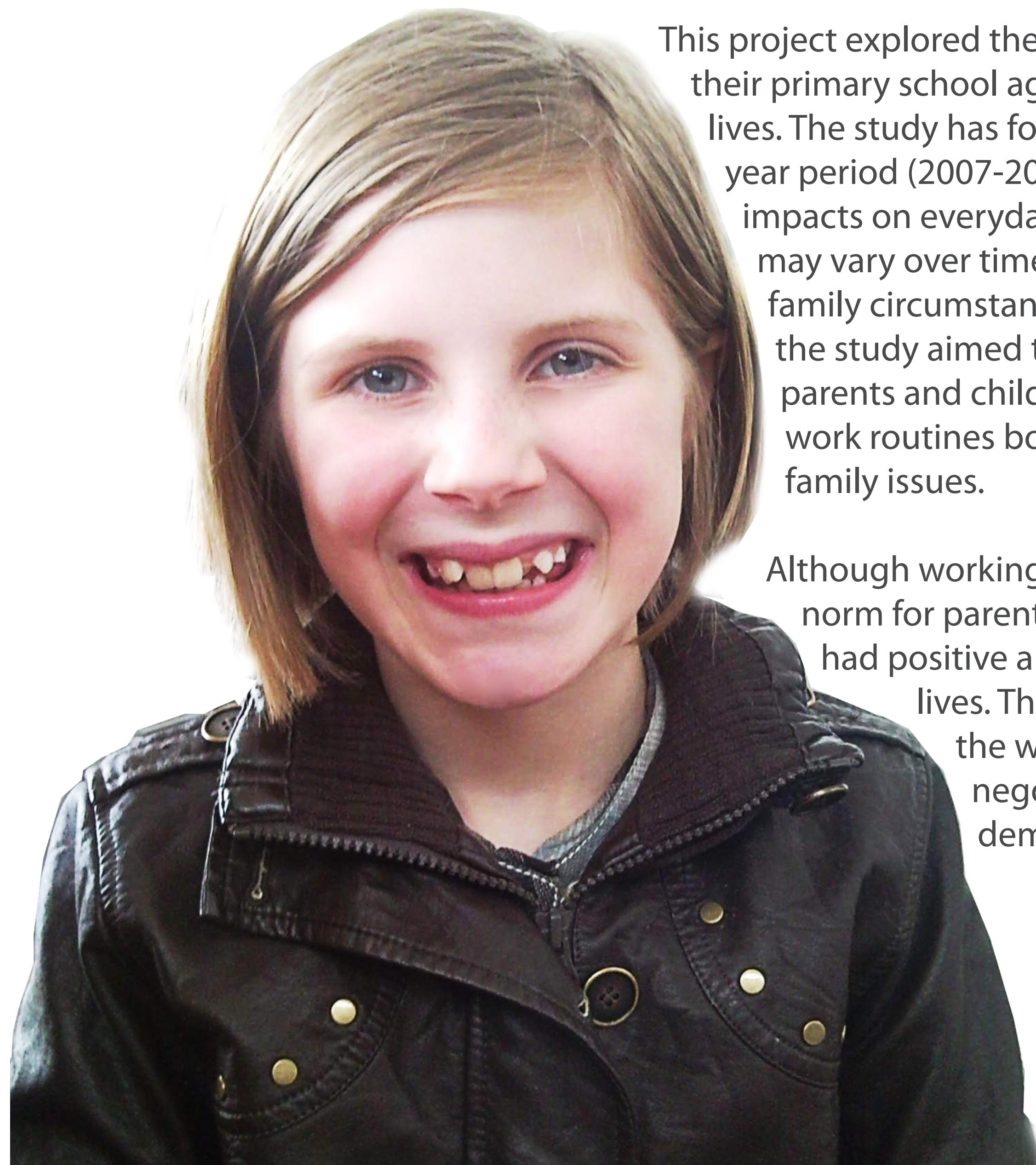


# PROJECT 5 - WORK AND FAMILY LIVES: THE CHANGING EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG FAMILIES



This project explored the ways in which working parents and their primary school aged-children negotiate work and family lives. The study has followed fourteen families over a three year period (2007-2010), exploring how working parenthood impacts on everyday family life and practices, and how this may vary over time in response to changes in work and family circumstances. By comparing families' experiences, the study aimed to deepen our understanding of how parents and children living under different income and work routines both generated and resolved work and family issues.

Although working parenthood was accepted as the norm for parents and children in our study, it clearly had positive and negative implications for everyone's lives. Through this rich data set we can explore the ways in which parents and children negotiated, and tried to balance the demands of, work and family across time.

## EXPERIENCING THE CHALLENGES OF WORKING PARENTHOOD

There were particular times of the day when the challenges of work and family life seemed most acutely experienced. Mornings and evenings were 'hot spots' and children were very aware of their parents feelings during such times.

Ashley was 9 years old when he was first interviewed. He lived with their mother and his twin brother Ryan. Their father lived with their older brother, Dean (20), a short distance away (although he was very involved in caring for them on a daily basis). Ashley's parents both worked full-time (his father in a manual job and his mother in a non-managerial position with the local authority), which meant he sometimes went to a breakfast club before school and either went to after-school clubs or stayed with a relative after school until his mother, Maggie, picked both Ashley and Ryan up after finishing work. In their first interview, Ryan and Ashley were asked to use emoticon stickers to indicate how they felt at different times of the day. They were also asked how they thought their parents felt (and to draw their faces). The following quote displays Ashley's awareness of how his parents' jobs could make him feel tired.

## ASHLEY

Interviewer: So we're going to put a sticker on for everyone that's in the house [in the morning]. So there's your mum, your dad and this is you and Ryan. So how do you think everybody in the house feels at that time, you draw faces on them if you want?

Participant: Quite tired.

I: Or you can write words or whatever you want to do yourself. So who are you drawing?

P: My brother Ryan. He's quite angry in the morning, because he thinks I wake him up with the telly, because I watch telly in the morning. My mum in the morning she's got hair dangling everywhere, and my dad...

I: That's a sad mouth you've put on her. How do you think she feels?

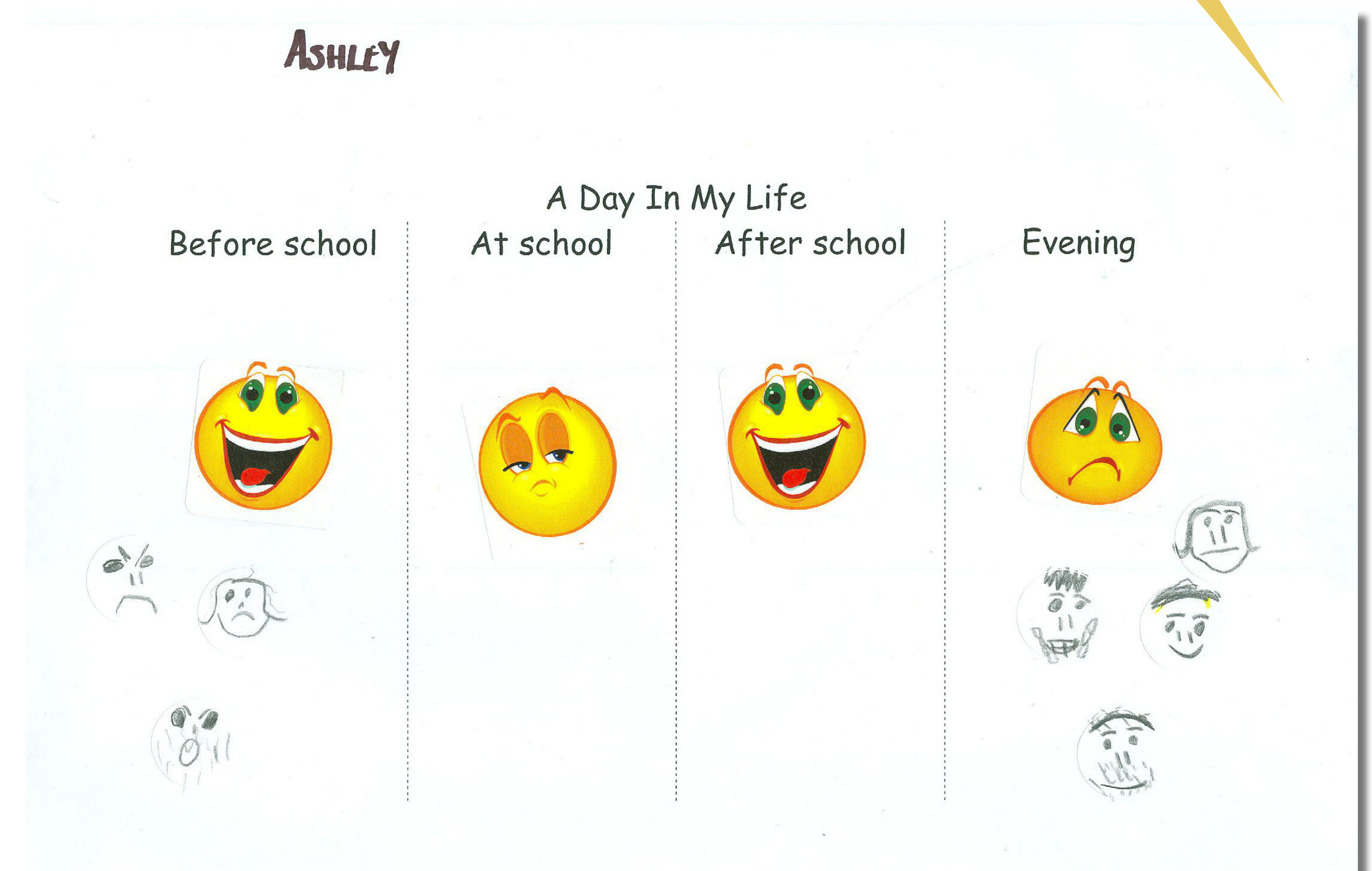
P: Quite tired. He feels quite angry in the morning, and tired at the same time. And mum feels quite tired and my dad comes down yawning. And sometimes at the weekend my brother Dean's there too... beard for my dad.

I: So you're the only one in that picture who's actually smiling in the morning?

P: Yes. I'm quite happy in the morning, because it's like a new day.

I: And why do you think the rest of them aren't that happy?

P: Because my mum's got to do most of the work, like washing up, but my dad does the dishes, I help him drying. My brother Ryan doesn't like drying dishes. He normally takes a wee tantrum.



## RESEARCH TEAM

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# CHILDREN'S VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES OF WORKING PARENTHOOD

Sisters Hannah and Charlotte were aged 10 and 9 respectively when the fieldwork began. As their parents were divorced, Hannah and Charlotte spent half the week living with their mother and the other half with their father and they spent alternate weekends with each parent. Both their parents worked full-time in managerial/professional jobs and the girls' mother, Emma, who also participated in the research, had a considerable distance to drive to her place of work, meaning they had to be up and out of the house early on weekday mornings. Charlotte and Hannah attended a privately run after-school club every day until around 6pm when either their mother or father picked them up after finishing, and travelling from, work. During their first interview, Hannah and Charlotte were asked to write down what is good and not so good about their parents going out to work and the interviewer asked them about what they had written. Although they both talked about the negative ways that their parents' employment has an impact on their lives, they also acknowledged the benefits for them of having parents in paid employment.

## DOWNSIDE TO PARENTS WORKING

Hannah observes that the negative aspects of her parents working meant that they were not able to collect her from school or play with them as they had so much work to do.

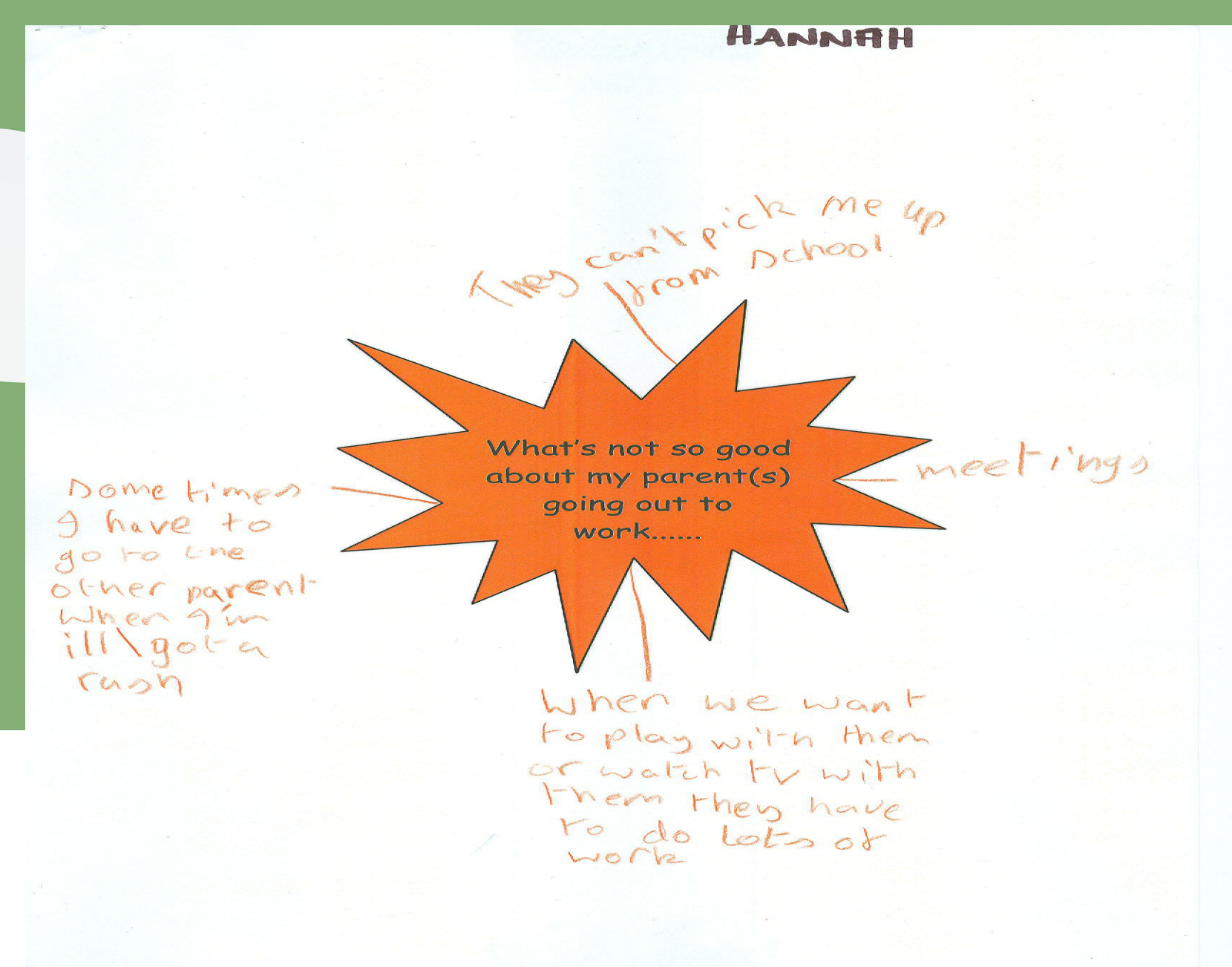
*"Once Mum was doing her work and I said, 'Can you help me with my knitting?' You know the one where I was cutting out and things? And erm I've still not done it cos she's doing these different things. It's like she says, 'I'll do it once I've finished my work'. It's like, it's going to take a long time though, so I did it. So when she did it I asked her, 'Can we do it now?' and she said, 'No it's too late. Brush your teeth, brush your hair and go to bed'."*

Occasions like the one Hannah relates here left her feeling upset and disappointed. She also mentions that:

*"it's like you've lost a bit of trust. She said she'll do something with you, like then she just doesn't do it..."*

Charlotte stated that the downside to her parents working was:

*"... that you don't really get to play with your friends that you're quite close to in the school, because you could just go around to their house, because you ask permission, instead of their havin' to pick you up from the after-school club."*



## UPSIDE TO PARENTS WORKING

Hannah felt that her parents' working was positive in some respects as it enabled them to provide pocket money. This meant that,

*"...you can buy more stuff and you can get more Nintendo games which I like...and I can get more electrical stuff. I'm into electrical stuff."*

Charlotte identifies the importance of working as:

*"...if you didn't have money you couldn't pay the mortgages if you spend something too much or you couldn't pay back the loans, if you wanted new furniture you couldn't buy that 'cause you have no money. And em ornaments and you couldn't get food because there, there's nothin' get."*

She also points out that her father had often warned them lightheartedly that:

*"...if I don't go to work you, you'll ha-, we'll have to live in a cardboard box. And then it wouldn't be so good because you'd feel quite cramped if you went and lived in a cardboard box. So it wouldn't be that great. No food supply, you'd have to dig in the rubbish. And hope there's anything that's been chucked out. That's not good."*

