

Analysing Early-Years Support Across Greater Manchester

Yichen Liu | BA (Hons) Social Sciences Criminology and Data Analytics

Overview of the Data Fellowship

Over the summer, I worked as a Q-Step Data Fellow with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and the charity Home-Start HOST, within its Baby Bank programme. The project aimed to integrate local Baby Bank referral data (covering over 1,700 families) with wider sources, including the Greater Manchester Baby Bank Impact Info dataset and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) 0–4 child-poverty statistics, to build a clearer picture of who accesses early-years support, what kind of items are most in demand, and how service reach is distributed across Greater Manchester.

This analysis also contributed to the UK Government's early-years mission to ensure that 75% of five-year-olds achieve a good level of development in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) assessment by 2028, providing an evidence base for service planning and outreach that better supports families and communities.

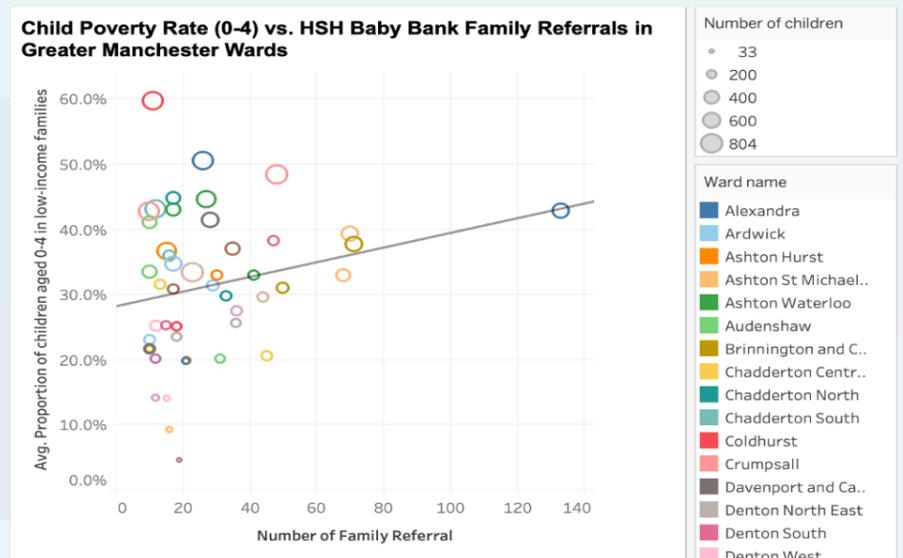
Data Analysis

I began by cleaning and standardising the referral data in Excel so it could be mapped and compared reliably. The cleaned data were combined with 0–4 child-poverty indicators to explore relationships between local deprivation and referral patterns across Greater Manchester.



Through its Baby Bank programme, Home-Start HOST help families meet essential needs during the early years.

To visualise these relationships, I used Tableau to build interactive dashboards that showed where families were referred from, which organisations made the most referrals, and which items were in the highest demand. I also created a Sankey diagram to visualise referral flows and a scatterplot comparing the 0–4 child-poverty rate with the number of referrals across wards. In this chart, each bubble represents a ward, scaled by the number of children in low-income families.



To mitigate challenges in raw and inconsistently formatted data, I proposed practical steps such as introducing postcode-based lookup tables to ensure consistency in organisation names, standardising data-entry formats, and adding a dedicated column for notes to meet value type consistency. These improvements would make future datasets more accurate and easier to analyse, supporting better planning for early-years services.

Findings

The analysis revealed clear spatial and demographic patterns in early-years support across Greater Manchester. Most of the children supported were aged 0–2, demonstrating the Baby Bank's strong focus on early-year families. Referral patterns revealed both high engagement in many communities and opportunities to strengthen outreach elsewhere. Item-level data showed strong demand for infant essentials, highlighting Baby Banks' vital role in supporting family well-being.

Key Skills Learnt

This was my first formal work experience and a key moment in building my confidence. I learned to communicate and collaborate professionally, adapt my analysis to real-world needs, and work with data that was often imperfect but meaningful. Learning Tableau independently helped me develop the ability to master new tools quickly and present complex data in a clear and accessible way.

Having seen that behind every number is a real family, and how insights produced could better inform organisations in extending service outreach, this experience confirmed my desire to continue using data analysis in addressing societal challenges.