

Austin Rice - The Unstale Analyst

Mindy: [00:00:00] Welcome to analysts Talk with Jason Elder. It's like coffee with an analyst, or it could be whiskey with an analyst reading a spreadsheet, linking crime events, identifying a series, and getting the latest scoop on association news and training. So please don't beat that analyst and join us as we define the law enforcement analysis profession.

One episode ahead time.

Jason: Thank you for joining me. I hope many aspects of your life are progressing. My name is Jason Elder and today our guest has five years of law enforcement analysis experience. He holds a master's of socials analysis with an emphasis on in criminology. He is also an instructor and a firefighter, but we won't hold that against him representing the great state of Minnesota.

Please welcome Austin Rice Austin. How are you doing? Doing

Austin: great, Jason. Thanks for having me on. All

Jason: right. So it's probably a little cold there in Minnesota today I would imagine.

Austin: It is, it is indeed.

Jason: Oh man. And are you originally from Minnesota?

Austin: No, I'm not. I I actually was born and raised in California, but spent most of my [00:01:00] childhood and growing up in Kansas City, Kansas side specifically.

So Kansas

Jason: City. So not as cold, but still can be cold. True. That is true. Okay. Well, hey, it is 68 degrees here in Tallahassee, Florida, just to rub it in. But anyway, so great to have you looking forward to getting your . Perspective, let's start in the beginning here.

How did you discover the law enforcement analysis profession? Yeah, so

Austin: I I did my undergraduate studies and graduate studies at Kansas State University in the great little town of Manhattan, Kansas. Also known as the little apple. But I started out as a biology and psychology major and kind of bounced around in my first couple years of undergrad and settled on psychology and got an advisor and me.

In meeting with my advisor, I was kind of interested in various aspects of psychology, but really liked kind of the psychology of crime and why crime happens and [00:02:00] took a. A class called like Drugs and Behavior and had my project be about drug crime and all this stuff. And I, I finally told my advisor, I'm like, well, I'm just really interested in crime.

And he's like, well, did you know that we have a criminology program within our sociology department here? And I was like, No, . Not at all. And so I went over and talked to the advisor in that department and ultimately changed my major for thankfully the last time. And settled on sociology and with an emphasis of criminology and My senior year, I actually, I met up with a bunch of great professors and was lucky enough to be involved in some undergraduate research projects.

And would, my senior year had a course where my whole entire summer was to get an internship. So I was looking for internships in various areas and had stumbled upon an opportunity in the great state of Pennsylvania of [00:03:00] all places with the Pennsylvania Attorney General's office and Applied out there and I was really interested in, again, kind of that narcotics drug trafficking type stuff.

And got placed within their Bureau of Narcotics investigation in drug control office, which was in Philadelphia. So my Kansas self uprooted my, my nice living arrangement in Manhattan, Kansas for the summer and moved out to Philadelphia and stayed in an apartment and just kind of bounced around all these different field offices and was out there.

And that's where I really got exposed to crime analysis as. I know it today. And working alongside that office's Intel analyst learning what I too was, and, and going through the motion of kind of an investigation. And they of course handed me all the typical intern work, but one of which was like coming through bank records, looking for statistical anomalies and joke was on them cuz I absolutely loved it because , that's, that was the one [00:04:00] thing that none of them wanted to do, but hand me a spreadsheet and I was tearing through that thing and pulling out different trends and abnormalities and I was really good at it.

So I knew that was a really good fit and I started like kind of the, the office specialty was really interesting. They did parcel interdiction and looking for abnormalities and shipping different parcels or suspicious points of origin or addresses, repeat addresses. And that was something that was very cool.

So of course when my time was up, I spent about three months out there, came back finished out my senior year and I was just all in on stats and trend analysis of crime and I was, I was sold. And I started then looking for jobs and crime analysis, just even, you know, what was that seven? ish years ago, was still like very kind of new.

There wasn't a ton of opportunities, especially in and around Kansas. And I really didn't know what I was doing entering the job market. And fortunately I was offered to stay at K State and [00:05:00] get my master's degree within the sociology department. And there was kind of this new kind of pathway, if you will, for getting your master's there.

It was the social analysis option, and it was, it was built perfectly for anyone who wanted to get into research methods and statistics surrounding social problems, including crime. So I, I stayed there got my master's program oddly enough, worked on compliance rates of public housing across the state of Kansas.

Wasn't what I wanted to work on, but what I wanted to work on was drug data. And that was kind of my first reality check of, of crime Data is very messy or doesn't exist in the ways that you think it does. So I got set up with the state health department to work on compliance rates, which I think overlaps pretty decently with some, some crime problems, but it was a great opportunity.

And towards the end of that program, I started looking for crime analyst jobs and. Very quickly learned that the best way to not get a crime analyst job is to geographically [00:06:00] isolate yourself in your search . Cuz there is no guarantee on, on where positions are open at any given time. So it was spread out all over the place and fortunately got moved forward in the, the Minneapolis police department process and got offered a job to move up to the Twin Cities.

And I jumped on it. It was a great opportunity and I've worked my way up through Crime Analyst one and I'm now a crime Analyst two here. And we've built out a great little units of crime analysts here and. really excited to be here, and it's a great spot to have landed. Oh,

Jason: great. There's a couple things to unpack there.

So I am from Pennsylvania, so I am still consider myself a PA boy, even though I live in Florida now. So, but Philadelphia, I haven't spent any time in

Austin: Philadelphia. Philadelphia's a I love, I love Philadelphia. It was it, it was a cool spot. I did all the touristy things.

Mm-hmm. for like the first couple weeks. And then some of the agents that I worked [00:07:00] with within that office, they, I think they were trying to scare. The, the living heck outta me, and they took me to all the, the dingy spots of Philadelphia. But you know, it, it was a very cool city to be in and I really enjoyed it.

Yeah.

Jason: Do you have a favorite dingy spot, ?

Austin: Well, they took me they took me up to Kensington and I actually, the, the, my favorite Dingiest spots were, The best places to go to get really good food in Philadelphia were the places that you would look at as an outsider and be like, there's no way in heck I'm stopping here.

It's pretty much any place that you thought that was the place to go to get really good food? Mostly Italian food or cheese steaks.

Jason: Yeah, just kind of built-in buildings that don't necessarily have the, the curb appeal that maybe you would be looking for. And yeah, I can imagine the case, well, that's, you get into the mom and pop places and that's a lot of what they're going to be, especially when a, he in a city with the way the city's structured.

That's, that's the way it's gonna [00:08:00] be. So, absolutely.

Austin: All right. Especially coming from Kansas . Yeah.

Jason: And we have something in common there as well that it sounds like we both went to school until we found a job. And I know that's not necessarily recommended, but that's what I did.

I couldn't find it after undergrad. Couldn't find it after getting a computer certificate. It wasn't until after I got my master's degree that I found a position. So with that master's degree, then it's social analytics, and you mentioned it goes through all the different types of testing in social environments.

I often say this for law enforcement analysis that I, I, I sometimes feel that there's not enough science. In the profession. Like we are not running statistical tests on much, if anything. Right. Not that I think, not that I'm suggesting that we do it with every single thing we do, but it seems to me that there should be some more science behind [00:09:00] some of the products that we are producing.

Austin: Absolutely. Yeah. It's, it's, you know, part of why I really liked that program is, you know, I learned all the social theory, I learned criminological theory, but then having that research methods component to it to understand, you know, how do you, how do you discern that your analysis is valid, like a, like validity test or regressions and, and all that stuff.

And it, it's important. It's really important in the field and, and you know, even I find myself with that background doing a lot of the work that I do day to day. Where I'm not including that stuff. And I sometimes will pause and think, oh, well, should we dig a little deeper, spend a little bit more time to add a little bit more depth to some of these numbers that we're crunching for people.

But also understanding your customer too, right? Is, is in these analytical products is somebody gonna know or really comprehend what these things are when they're just asking simply [00:10:00] for numbers over five years. Right.

Jason: You mentioned that they're important, and you mentioned, also mentioned that it, it can be confusing to your audience.

So what would you tell folks of like, why they should be running tests on the stuff that we're. .

Austin: That's a great question. You know especially in today's day and age, interest in law enforcement trends and specifically data around policing is at an all time high. You look at any news cycle today, and usually you're gonna find something about crime trends in there.

And it's important, you know, it's not often included in some of the reporting out of, of crime trends of if crime is up or down. But it's important to add context as an analyst of is this increase or decrease statistically significant, but also kind of having the understanding as an analyst to provide context so that people can consume that information and understand really what it means.

So for instance, you know, [00:11:00] One of my biggest pet peeves or kind of like secret disdains in criminology or, or crime trends is homicide. So homicide

metrics personally, I think are really important to keep a really close eye on, but they're so subjective to very wide swings, especially in smaller or mid-size agencies.

And granted, you know, we did see a, a fairly significant increase in homicides, but year over year in recent history we haven't taken into account things such as how EMS services have changed out in the field to increase survivability of gunshot wounds, things like that outside of just raw numbers haven't really been taken into account.

And you get into the ones and twos comparisons. You know, you, that's where you get the, the yearly, well, homicide is up in x, y, Z city. Mm-hmm. , but really it's 34 as opposed to 32 the previous year. So, and that's well within a standard range over time. [00:12:00] So,

Jason: Yeah, we, we always made the comment when I worked at Baltimore Police Department of how John Hopkins did their part to keep the homicide rate at bay because they clearly saved people that and other, circumstances may have died.

Austin: Right, absolutely. As my, my other kind of experience or, or side job is as a firefighter in E M T and, you know, just even things, just having that perspective of kind of that world is , you know, things in EMS have changed so drastically from, so for instance, in Minneapolis, our last big homicide spike was in the 1990s what EMS providers did in the 1990s as opposed to today it's incredibly different, right?

Mm-hmm. , it's some of the interventions that are allowed chest seals and some of the science behind, you know, what makes gunshot wounds really fatal in understanding that providers have a much better understanding of that today. And the [00:13:00] survivability of a gunshot wound in a lot of urban areas has undoubtedly become far better better odds of survival based on some of.

these really fantastic interventions that our paramedics do across the country every day.

Jason: Yeah, it, I What comes to mind when you say that is even traffic patterns. I think what we've a, as cities have learned over the last 20, 30 years about traffic has, would also influence

Austin: that. Absolutely. Absolutely.

But again, kind of coming full circle to that I think it's really, I think it is kind of the place of the analyst to, to keep those external factors kind of in mind when we are reporting out on some of these trends and, and caution folks when they want to go back and compare homicide rates from the 1980s or 1990s to today.

Yeah. And

Jason: I what homicide is an interesting phenomena because. Look the [00:14:00] details of why the homicide happened and, and is this going to lead to other violence, right? There's, because in terms of police departments, you're obviously investigating the homicide and you're investigating the case and you're looking to find out who's responsible for the homicide.

There's that aspect to it, but then there's the purpose of the police gets into more prevention and your policies from there to prevent future ones from happening, right? So in that regard, . And for the layperson, this might be difficult for them to put their wrap their heads around, but a domestic violence homicide is treated differently from a homicide in which rival groups are involved.

Absolutely. Right. Or, if it's a robbery in progress in which it seems the intention was to rob not necessarily murder the person that's going to be treated [00:15:00] differently if it's a drug deal gone wrong. Sure. Type thing. And I think that could be difficult for some people that they might not want to hear that if, right.

You know, they, they might not want to hear the facts when they're in fear for themselves.

Austin: Absolutely. And you know, I, again, like that's where I and my cohorts as analysts we really are gonna looked to, to provide some of that context. And, you know, granted we don't always collect these data points.

It's not always built into r m s systems to have these things considered when you're filling out a police report. And so it's important to also explain some of the limitations to these numbers of like what you mentioned about domestic homicides too. It's, you know, you could have, say your homicide difference in a year is 10, but.

Seven of them were domestic homicides. Mm-hmm. , it's tough to kind of delineate that out and explain that to the public cuz no matter what the, [00:16:00] these homicide is an incredibly tragic situation no matter what the

circumstances are. And so you kind of have to walk a very fine line of, of not sounding tone deaf and just spewing numbers as an analyst.

Right. Yeah. And, and understanding these things and, and knowing that the community wants these, this information. But you have to, to go about it in a very tactful way and and really be forthright with, with information. Yeah,

Jason: I always think of the Z score and in these Cuz Z scores are, can tell you how predictable or how volatile a set is.

Absolutely. Certainly if you get a, a set of data that's really volatile lots of differences theft from autos or auto burglaries, , whatever you call them you are, you are not gonna get the, the Z score may tell you that, eh, that's not really that that important. There's a lot of noise [00:17:00] there, but again, if you go through a series of theft broma in a particular area, they're not gonna want to hear that.

The numbers say it's not

Austin: that important. Absolutely right. . Absolutely . That's also one of my, my other disdains in crime stats is at least in Minneapolis, our neighborhoods are very small too. So neighborhood crime statistics are one of my greatest disclosures and reporting out on, because I know that things such as Z-score is when you are looking at like a six block area.

When you're telling somebody who lives in an ar neighborhood, well technically this, this crime status, so say it's shootings are. Are in line with what your neighborhood sees on any given time period, but they live on that Northwestern quadrant and the next neighborhood over has seen an exponential increase.

They don't like hearing that, right? Because it, it, you treat things like neighborhoods have these giant walls where folks are not exposed to what's happening just on the other side of the [00:18:00] street. So, yeah.

Jason: So I, I do want to encourage you though that I think this is a really good topic for a conference presentation.

Absolutely right? I think so too. And. And it doesn't even necessarily need to be a how to or scare people with a bunch of statistical tests. Why is statistical tests important in the law enforcement analysis profession? Yeah. So I, I really

encourage you to put in for that, for the I A C A conference or the Minnesota Regional what.

What's the one? Macia?

Austin: It's called Macia and great group of animals from across the state. And we had a good little contingent group representing Minnesota at I c and Chicago this year. But yeah, who knows? Maybe you'll maybe I'll put in for something and you'll see me in the Dallas area or grapevine Texas.

Jason: Look at you. Very good. Being very specific. See, because I had Jonathan softly on a [00:19:00] couple weeks ago, and he made sure to correct me that it wasn't Dallas, it was grapevine. I'm like, oh, well, sorry that it's got it wrong. It's a suburb that we're at. We're not in Dallas or Fort Worth. We're in Grapevine, but, all right.

Well, so let's then talk about your, you get the job, you're in Minneapolis, PD r pretty big city, pretty big police department. , what do you think in the first. Time walking into the building and, starting your, career as an analyst? Yeah.

Austin: You know, it's it was, it was kind of daunting, I'm not gonna lie.

Minneapolis is a big city and it, there was a lot going on then even in 2018. And just kind of getting my footing and understanding, you know, the different roles of different types of analysts. So here we have both dedicated crime analysts, but we also have intelligence analysts and really getting the lay of the land in terms of sort of roles and responsibilities and how we co-mingle [00:20:00] and, and work together.

But also just understanding, you know records management systems and, and data table structure and, and what things can and cannot be analyzed together. policing data is incredibly messy. So actually one of my very favorite things not to go too much on a sidebar, but this is something that I think really accurately portrays how I felt coming in as a, a new analyst, fresh out of, of graduate school, we're all data's perfect.

It's you, you don't have to deal with much messy data. But it actually was like a, a cartoon from, I think it was Portland, Oregon or somewhere out Pacific Northwest. They did a story on police police department's, records management system, and, and they had a cartoonist draw a picture where it depicts an officer frantically typing on a computer while he is sitting on a ship that's sinking into the water

And I think that was really funny because you kind of picture this. Like policing data in general. You write a report, everything's perfect, [00:21:00] all is well. But in reality it's kind of this imperfect conglomerate of information that's all shoved into a, a software system.

And you as an analyst or expected to extrapolate that back out and, and make something of it or God forbid, you have two separate software systems and you have to combine those two and Case numbers together and, and yeah, it's a big mess. But once I overcame that, you know, I had a great group of, fellow crime analysts and sworn staff in the chief's office.

I was all super supportive and in taking on the kind of Tom stat and understanding that I had always heard of Comstat and, and knew of Comstat from books and readings of how police departments did it out east and every department does it differently. And so just kind of embracing that all was, that was a lot to take in.

But it was a great place

Jason: to do it. Okay. So then, What are some tasks that you're doing in the beginning? Obviously you mentioned you're supporting comstat, but what are some things that you're focusing on when you first start? [00:22:00] Yeah, so,

Austin: You know, back in 20 18, 20 19, 1 of minneapolis's biggest problems at the time was actually overdoses.

And it was something that the department was really starting to look into, how could we more efficiently investigate these? And one of my tasks at first was to onboard and help bring in ida's OD MAP program and, and launch that and make Minneapolis a contributing agency work collaboratively with our city health department, state health departments all sorts of folks community groups understanding how we can turn our calls for service data for overdoses.

Actionable information to help spread news to the community that, hey obviously narcotics are fentanyl especially is always dangerous, but mm-hmm. We're seeing that statistical anomaly that we have far more overdoses than normal. And really that's what. OD map really is that, I'm not sure how familiar everyone is with [00:23:00] OD map, but there's the concept of a spike alert and they try to categorize these trends.

And really what a spike alert is, is a standard deviation. So anytime that your numbers fall. two and a half times above the standard deviation, or really you

can customize it on the backend. It creates an overdose spike. And that gets email blasted to whoever you are community partners with so that you can implement sort of an action plan to distribute Narcan strategically to certain areas whatever it may be.

So that was really one of the bigger projects that I tackled as a new analyst on really kind of taking on a citywide problem and working with a lot of fellow analysts from around the state and metro area who were incredibly helpful. And just trying to understand again, you know, what are some of the limitations of policing data, but.

With the fire department and EMS providers, they were really restricted in a lot of the information they could provide. So it was kind of odd that, you know, the police department really had the [00:24:00] best opportunity to collect and share some of this data that could be shared with our community health partners.

So that was one of the things that I first did. My first big project and carried that up all the way up until 2020 when some of my roles started to change.

Jason: You hit on some several good points there when you're talking about a citywide problem. It's not just one department's responsibility, right.

It Right. And I think it's. It's, it can be daunting, but when you see collaboration like that where you get , all those city departments working in unison and to understand that we can come at this from various directions. We don't have to use a hammer every time, right. Type thing.

Right. There are several avenues that we , could tackle this , and when you get a spike, In overdoses, for instance. , it's not just, oh, please start cracking down[00:25:00] , on the streets, or, what's the intel saying? Is there something where we have a bad batch of drugs , in the area it's dealing with health and counseling and , the other departments and how they can help with this issue as well.

Austin: Absolutely. You're 100% correct and, you know, I felt that Minneapolis would, were, we were really starting to respond to some of these things. , it was a great group of collaborative individuals who were really trying to. Turn this information that, you know, up until then was just CAD data that would just come in, officers would respond and it would just sit in a data repository.

And turning that into an actionable item was very rewarding. And, you know, undoubtedly made a positive impact across the region. And continues to do so

through till this day. It's just changed a little bit. And now our partners at Hennepin County take on some of that responsibility as we [00:26:00] just, our bandwidth was spread too far and we could not maintain it, but we set the groundwork for it.

And some of those projects still exist today. Yeah.

Jason: Hmm. Yeah. And you also mentioned Comstat and had Deb Peel on the show and she of course ran NYPD's Comstat, or at least worked on N y p D'S Comstat, and she said that N y p D'S. Com stat is focused on patterns and trends and every single pattern and trend is given a number and is worked on.

And that is really the focus of their comp stat. And it's fascinating cuz I think if you talk to people outside of N Y P D, at least early on, when I was working in the early two thousands, the word was accountability. Everything was accountability. That you're gonna be responsible for the stats that are in your.

Section post district, whatever it, however it's broken up in a city that's, you're gonna [00:27:00] be accountable for that. So you're gonna be responsible for that. So where do you think , Minneapolis PD is in that spectrum for

cathar

Austin: com stat? Yeah, so this is, you know, really good timing for this question cuz we've really and it started from the top down as really trying to reevaluate Comstat or here we call it m stat for Minneapolis Statistics, , everybody has to put their little spin on it.

But you know, part of it too was when I first came on in, in 2018, are reported crimes were far different than they are today and, and back then it really changes. Department leadership a lot and how they view CompStat or am stat in our case. Mm-hmm. . But you know, Minneapolis, by all I intents purposes in 20 18, 20 19 when I first came on, was arguably one of the safest large cities in the country.

We had homicides in the thirties on an annual basis and it kind of turned into , this meeting [00:28:00] where we were running out of things to talk about. There wasn't as much crime to really form trends on a weekly basis, or at least it felt that way at first. And, you know, it kind of turned into this meeting where just information was kind of regurgitated and it was more of just an information sharing meeting.

And certainly when trends popped up, we would address those. But, you we weren't doing , a really purposeful job of tracking outcomes really, we would say like, well, here's how we're gonna respond to this issue. And then we would just say, well, this issue's gone

All right, move on to the next issue. But we really didn't evaluate any of those efforts. And I think we were doing ourself a disservice because it's important to understand how we've responded to issues previously, to know what strategies or tactics in certain geographic areas had really positive outcomes.

So now, you know in the last couple months and really. In the last couple years, we've seen an [00:29:00] unfortunate drastic increase in, in violent crime specifically in shootings gunfire, activity, robberies, carjacking. So we have a large amount of, data to work with. And we actually had comstat every two weeks, and now that has transformed into a weekly occurrence where we have dedicated slides for trend scene and positive outcomes or also what actions didn't really see any positive outcomes.

You don't need positive outcomes every week. Not everything is going to work, but it's important to know what does work and where so that we can shift some of our resources and, and tactics and use our crime analysts to, to better understand what those trends are doing in certain geographic areas.

Jason: Yeah, I think almost every meeting that I've ever been part of that was part of a series, whether it was weekly, biweekly, monthly, it eventually went stale. Like you, right. It started out great. There was a lot of [00:30:00] movement in the beginning, and at some point in time, the majority of participants were on autopilot, and you had to change it up.

You had to do something different at, at some point in time. And also your statement, and I was thinking of when you said you weren't assessing, I was, I would say, well, John Eck say that you're doing SAR not Sarah. Right. So but it's good that you put that last a in, in your com stats. So that's that's good.

Kristen: Hi, this is Kristen Lockman. My public service announcement is to say, get your face out of your phone and your fingers off your keyboard, and make that face-to-face contact because that's how you'll connect with other people.

Jennifer: This is Jennifer Loafer. It's okay to fall apart. Sometimes tacos fall apart too, and we still love them.

Jason: [00:31:00] Let's move on to your analyst badge story then. Sure. And for those that may be new to the show, the analyst badge story is the career defining case or project that an analyst works on. And for you it's right in the beginning 2019 and Minneapolis is hosting the Final four. Yes. So just for those that may not know what that is, that's the, the college basketball tournament and the final four, it's the National Championship Games and Big event.

It's Super Bowl esque. Maybe not as big as the Super Bowl, but it certainly impacts many different areas of a city. And so for you, how did it impact your day-to-day

Austin: work life? Sure. Yeah. It's so it helped actually that right before I came on Minneapolis pd Minneapolis had hosted the Super Bowl just the year prior.

Mm-hmm. , so a lot of the [00:32:00] infrastructure and plans were in place from the Super Bowl. But I was actually tasked with staffing the multi-agency command center for the Minneapolis Final Four. And it was an approximately two week assignment. And of course as the new analyst I got assigned to work the overnights , which was always fun cuz everything happened at night.

All the events in, in a lot of the activity was in the nighttime. But really anytime a city hosts something like this a large event, your city landscape entirely changes, which for crime analysts can be pretty challenging because you know of. You know, geographic trends in areas that are routinely problematic or have infrastructure in place that make them less likely to experience crime.

But when you host a large event such as the Final Four or Super Bowl, you have all these side events that are kind of scattered all throughout the geographic space around the city. And also just the large influx of people who come in and [00:33:00] you're. Constantly tracking any trends or patterns or suspicious activity that, you know the way that you look at your crime data also changes just the implications of some of the national security risks of having a large event such as the Final Four you know, a general suspicious person, caller, suspicious vehicle.

You just sort of look at it a little bit differently and, and you have to change some of the ways in which you're writing your products or what you're including in your products as well. So, you know, in stolen vehicle reports, things such as Stolen U-Haul or cargo vans are. Of particular concern, whereas any given week, you're like, oh, somebody didn't return their U-haul like that happens every week.

So it, it changed you know, what we focused on. But also that was really my first exposure to working in a command center with national incident management practices in place incident command structure and kind of [00:34:00] navigating that whole structure and sort of reporting structure and day-to-day activities.

And, but it was really also a great experience to see face-to-face and understand some of your. State, federal or just even local partners that you normally wouldn't interact with on a day-to-day basis and kind of all the, the greatest resources in your area, all in one room. So it was, it was very cool to see that and just the very also just a lot of the technology that came out of hosting that event that we were able to implement, especially as it pertains to mapping.

You know, we had the folks from Esri come in and help do technical onsite support for creating like a 3D map of our entire downtown and things that sort of, we were able to take and run with. Going forward that helped increase some of our abilities in our day-to-day after that event.

Jason: Obviously when people think of a large event like that, they've seen enough movies to think, [00:35:00] oh, you're trying to prevent a terrorist attack. Right? Right. And, but with all the different venues that are going on throughout the city at different times, each has their own security issues and it's maybe .

The less sexy stuff that comes about where you're, you're talking about maybe a, a, a theft or a robbery that is just within that confines of where that area is. Or maybe it's guests that have gotten outta hand, they had maybe too much to drink, and then they're, they're putting other people in danger.

So there's, there's the aspect of like an overt terrorist act or an overt crime, but then there's just other stuff where, okay, people are in danger. We have that type of security issue at each one of these little events. at the Final four. Right.

Austin: And, you know Minneapolis, , one of the great parts about the [00:36:00] city is a lot of our sporting events and infrastructure for those large events are all downtown.

Mm-hmm. . So we have sort of our downtown bar district right in the midst of our football stadium, our baseball stadium and target center where the timber rolls play or basketball arena, all within a very small geographic footprint of downtown. So all these events, things such as, you know, fights or a robbery mm-hmm.

are also still really important because. They, we don't want those things to get outta hand for multiple reasons. But also we're hosting a lot of people in from out of town, and this is their sometimes first impression of Minneapolis. Mm-hmm. . And so it, it was very interesting to see from a resource standpoint of how do we equitably and evenly spread out these resources to maintain a constant level of just presence and deter some of these, you know, regular street [00:37:00] crimes in this area where the opportunity for victimization is exponentially higher by hosting this event with all these people downtown.

So. Okay. And then in terms

Jason: of your position as an analyst, what did you take out from working. This event?

Austin: Yeah, that's a great, great question because I thought that, you know, my role as an analyst, the way that I viewed a lot of things somewhat changed from that. In, in that I really grew more comfortable with certain things such as like our camera systems and understanding uh, how to operate those, but also, , you know, understanding how important a landscape of a city is and how certain changes to an a landscape of either a downtown area or a residential area can impact crime and understanding some of the, the give and take of changing, you know, just the, the normal operation of, of an area.

And really [00:38:00] understanding the, the importance of place and suitable targets and likely offenders, all co-mingling in a geographic area and really taking that and moving that forward and, and how we talked about handling certain crime hotspots or, or just the impact of, you know, a licensing change of, of somebody opening a new bar in an area that had purely been residential for a long time.

So that's kind of how my, my perspective changed on, on moving forward into day-to-day operations after that. Okay. Good.

Jason: Now in 2022, you are working on a gun crime. Task force, correct?

Austin: Yeah. You know, you know, we, Minneapolis had a exponential increase essentially in our gunshot victims annually and our homicides as well.

So we went from that 30 ish mid thirties, low forties metric annually for our homicides up to. The mid nineties, upper nineties and [00:39:00] homicide victims, which had, you know, you really don't think about the impacts of that

organizationally as well. So the drain on investigators and intel analysts that's just more and more of a workload there.

But also just our shooting victims. Carjackings became a thing on average. We had like 50 carjackings in a year. Up well into the mid hundreds in terms of individual incidents. So the, the use of a gun became far more prevalent in, in many of our crimes. So we developed strategies amidst dwindling staffing on how can we most effectively utilize the staff that we have now to make the greatest impact in terms of our gun violence.

So we we found that, you know, we make a really positive impact by being in the right. Geographic areas that are most likely to experience gun crime and really understanding our hotspots across the city. And we launched an initiative that was known as the Greater [00:40:00] Minneapolis Violent Crimes Initiative.

So Minneapolis is a fairly small, large city, so we're about 50 ish square miles. But we saw crimes spread outside of that boundary. And we are known as the Twin Cities. So we have our friends over in St. Paul just to our east as well. So we were thinking. Of how we develop a strategy that utilized all of our partners, that being the state local county level and federal partners to make a positive impact on crime.

And we did focus enforcement details that put these officers in strategic places that were our year-to-date crime hotspot. So maintaining a a proactive presence in a lot of these areas was really important. And we started to see. That by being in these areas and understanding who was perpetuating most of these criminal acts and taking guns out of their hands, we started to see our shootings decrease [00:41:00] in those areas and understanding concepts and ha integrating an analyst to be able to speak to things such as displacement.

So just because crime goes down in an area, we wanna make sure we're just not spreading it elsewhere, right? Mm-hmm. and. We, it was a long initiative through the summer and we actually started to see our guns recovered, surpassed the 1000 mark in the year, which had never been done in Minneapolis before.

So in 20 20, 20 21 and 2022, we've now surpassed 1000 guns recovered for three consecutive years, which had never happened previously. So really being purposeful about intercepting or interrupting these cycles of violence to, to make a positive impact and decreased crime. So we carried that through the summer and then started to develop some other data-driven ways in which we

could be most effective with dwindling resources in our sworn staff by, you know, looking at places where we could do foot beats [00:42:00] when the weather's nice.

I don't know. Mm-hmm. Many officers who would want to do a foot beat in Minnesota in the winter, but they're really important. You know, if people are out and about we should be as well, was sort of the, the thought behind it. And, you know, we made a really positive impact and we started to see. Our stats switch from this kind of ever presence increasing level of gun violence to now.

We've seen our, our gunshot wound victims decreased by nearly 20% as opposed last year hyper locally in these focused zones and hotspots those decreases are even greater. So implementing data and analytics and essentially performance evaluation of what's working and what's not on essentially a weekly timetable and constantly feeding information to these officers of well for one, also just showing them what they're doing is working, which I think is really important.

Even in day-to-day operations and other analysts across the country is information should be trickling [00:43:00] back down to officers to show positive impacts of, of their efforts because it really boosts sort of the the buy-in, if you will, and, and new efforts and change and implementing new strategies.

It's important that, that they hear that too. So it's been a really long effort. And it's really continuing through the end of the year and, and well into the new year. These are things that we're gonna continue to do and, and be really purposeful with implementing analytics in data into day-to-day operations.

Yeah.

Jason: Now, is there another stage for this project, or what do you think the future for 2023

Austin: is? You know, I think that this is the first really big step of the new normal, right? It's we're not gonna snap our fingers and get back to the sworn numbered staff that we were at before, which I know many departments across the country are facing.

But as an analyst, Department of Leadership has leaned on analytics more to be very purposeful with where we're deploying our resources. So I [00:44:00]

foresee that this is sort of a new normal in which we're very purposeful using data and where we're deploying these resources to make positive impacts.

So, Hmm. All right. Well, let's

Jason: talk serious subject Dow. Not that we haven't been talking serious to this point, but George Floyd, I know from my perspective, when I hear of a police involved shooting, had this barrier there that I didn't know the people involved. I didn't know the staff or the police chief.

But obviously for you, that is different because this isn't just any police department. This is the badge that you wear on your ID for work. So I'm not necessarily asking you to speak for your department. There are people that this case impacted [00:45:00] way more than you, but what I'd like to get is, given that this is your department where you were working as an analyst, how did this impact you personally?

Austin: Yeah, you know, it was a incredibly tragic mark and moment in time for our community, but also across the country there were ripples felt around the world. And you know, when I think about the moment in which this really hit me in my, in my personal life, outside of, other than, you know, almost everyone that I knew reaching.

To talk to me about it or want to talk to me about it, which was incredibly tough. I also, at the time, was going right into the fall semester teaching an introduction to policing course at a local college, and a lot of my students lived [00:46:00] or worked in the community of Minneapolis or immediate surrounding areas, and that was a very personally challenging moment, but also one of, of personal and professional growth to the point that, you know, the, the classroom is, A place for learning and growth.

And you know, one of the great things about a college classroom too, is you get everyone together in a class to talk about a subject from all different backgrounds and experiences and ideas. And that includes the instructor. And I just so happened to be a crime analyst working for the Minneapolis Police Department, which was troubling for a lot of my students, understandably.

And I, you know, worked through that whole semester and there were tough conversations that were had and, and, but also a [00:47:00] lot of really productive conversations in which as an instructor, I got to bring in. Criminal theory and, and social theory. And we got to talk about just policing in as in

general. And those students were in an introduction to policing course at one of the most, if not the most pivotal moment in policing history.

And it wasn't until towards the very end of that class that one of the students had come up to me and, and she said, you know Austin, I, I really thank you for this semester. But I have to tell you, I almost dropped your class when the first day when you introduced yourself and said who you were and what you did, because I didn't trust you.

And that was really, Really, I guess that was, that, that was a lot for me to process. But she said, you know, I am really grateful that I stayed in this course because I felt like I learned so much and really appreciated your insights, which for me [00:48:00] was, was really rewarding because it had been very difficult to process.

But that was a pivotal moment that I really believed in, you know, transparency and in sharing information about law enforcement and the role of analytics and data and, and, and the science element of it, right? Research methods and, and understanding why or trying to understand why is so important, especially today in, in talking through these, these difficult moments following the case of, of George Floyd.

Jason: And, well, here's two more. Coming together in 2023. Okay? Absolutely. All right. There's not really a good way to segue away from that, so we're just going to do it. We met at the I A C A conference, and we got to talking in the prep call about different topics that we heard and discussed, and I thought it was interesting.

One of the topics that you found interesting was at the [00:49:00] conference, it seemed like there was not so much intel work as there was data analytics. So let just take that idea part a little bit.

Austin: Yeah, absolutely. And you know, that was one of the things after leaving Chicago and, and we had myself and one other analyst from.

Department went and we of course brought back all of our, our knowledge learned and wrote up notes and to share. When we get back and as I'm going through all the courses that I went through before and reviewing my notes, it just struck me that I felt this shift. And the last time that I had gone to an I C A conference was in DC in 2019.

And I felt this shift of, perhaps slightly less intel oriented course material, more research and evaluation and statistics type of presentations, which I think you. . Getting back to, you know, sort of the shift in, in policing [00:50:00] through modern days is there is this increasing reliance on data and information sharing and, and statistics both as it relates to performance measures of, of policing, but also just crime stats and mm-hmm.

One of those moments actually Noah Fretz presented in the DOJ track, which also that was, I think one of the moments was that DOJ or BJ had a, a whole classroom just reserve that whole week just mm-hmm. for very specific criminology and statistics and research method type presentations and, and his presentation was on sabermetrics and how it relates to baseball.

And, and I think it was Sabre Metrics since to baseball as crime Analyses took policing. And yeah, that was like my favorite presentation that whole week because it really put data and analytics and statistics at the forefront of the conversation around policing. And, you know, it's it was really good to see some of our federal research partners involved and in [00:51:00] sponsoring a lot of these, these projects because these are the types of things that are being asked of police departments and agencies to report out on nowadays and.

I think that sort of the crime analyst tends to get tasked with figuring out how to extrapolate this type of information for an agency. So I was very happy to see that sort of shift and not necessarily less intel stuff. Cause that's, that stuff is very cool to listen to and, and learn from. But you know, I, I was glad to see sort of the, the course materials be more representative of at least what I was experiencing and in the increase in demand for performance measures, evaluation metrics, data, everything like that.

So, yeah, given

Jason: how big a baseball fan Noah is, it's not surprising that he has a baseball analogy. All right. And then I guess another, a aspect to the conference is the idea [00:52:00] of analysts going to the private sector. and the, topic of how does police departments or government retain their analyst?

Austin: Yeah.

That was an incredibly eye-opening theme that I noticed. And I think it's important for us as a profession to, to keep talking about this because Chris Delaney, who is from Esri fantastic resource to talk to if you're somebody who

uses Esri products he put on a class or a presentation on analyst transitioning to the private sector.

And, you know, I saw it and I'm like, well, that's interesting. And I was actually gonna go to the presentation across the hallway from it. I don't even remember what it was anymore. And I remember just peering in the door and seeing almost every single chair full. Mm-hmm. , which was the first time I had seen that in any class.

I think there. And I'm like, what in the world is going on in here? And I walk in there and I [00:53:00] see that it's this presentation. I'm like, well, this is interesting. Like, I'm gonna, I'm just gonna sit down and, and listen to this. And you know, personally, I person. As of now or anytime in the future, don't have plans to jump ship to the private sector, but I thought it was interesting that so many people did and I wanted to listen to what was being shared.

And they actually shared a lot of findings on why analysts are transitioning to the private sector and listing out a lot of the reasons that that switch is happening. And of course, it's pay benefits being overworked, the kind of emotional toll that it takes on you. And you know, also the lack of upward movements or the opportunity for upward movement within a police department, which is something that I started to look at this class as how can I, as a more senior analyst in our unit, take these things from this presentation to bring back, to ensure that we can maintain units [00:54:00] without turnover.

Mm-hmm. . And I think that it was a moment that I'm sure other analysts saw too, going back to their agency is, how can we take these things, seeing these. It was more than a hundred people without a doubt. Mm-hmm. in this room. How can we take this as a sign of, of, you know, we need to be doing things differently.

And I'm really proud of my agency for building out some depth within the crime analysis and intel analyst positions so that we have, for instance, a crime analyst, one position with seven salary steps, and we have a crime analyst two position with seven salary steps. So now we have a civilian crime analyst supervisor with, again, seven salary steps.

So we're building out sort of the, the longevity of having new recruits or new analysts that we hire to be able to see. You can stay here and work through three separate positions with three separate salary ranges for the long haul. And you know, there was a conglomerate from Houston pd Patrick Alexander.

Think [00:55:00] presented at the Esri conference in San Diego this last year, and they mentioned that they started looking at their crime analysis unit and, and kind of business technology unit as a small tech startup in sort of you know, thinking about those things and how we can compete with the private sector, even though we can't the, the harsh reality is we really can't, but be thinking about ways that we can make it more attractive for analysts to stay if even for a little bit longer.

Yeah. Was that Freddie

Jason: Croft? Yes. Yeah. Yeah. Okay. Yeah. Fred, I've had Freddie on the show. Excellent.

I've said this a couple times on the show, really, I think it's great that there's stages now of mobility. W. As one, two, and three for analysts. Certainly wasn't there, you know, in many spots 20, 30, 40 years ago.

And, but it, I think, or more civilian in the police department, [00:56:00] I think will be a benefit to the law enforcement analysis profession. Having folks work up from being an analyst, getting all the way up to leadership positions on the executive staff for police chiefs. I think that will pay off exponentially to this profession that it is a little disconcerting.

I sound like old man elder saying this , but it is disconcerting that there's so many people. Get so far in, in government police departments and then go off to the private sector because I think there is this huge benefit to the profession to have senior level executive leadership

Austin: that we're analyst.

Absolutely. And right back to sort of the retention issue is, that's just another step for young analysts entering the field to see, I can stay here or I can [00:57:00] make this profession in the public sector a little bit longer than I would have. Without those steps. Okay,

Jason: good. And then how about advice for analysts?

What's your advice?

Austin: My advice for analysts would be, I guess I'll, I'll separate this too a little bit. So advice for like new analysts and analysts that have been in for a few years. So my advice for new analysts is sort of twofold. So one is, Keeping in

mind what we've talked about with the importance of data and analytics and whether you want to be an Intel analyst or a crime analyst, data is sort of at the root of it all.

And my advice would be if you're in college to the point like young would be analysts take a class in statistics or research methods, something that. Gives you a really good understanding of how data and, and research methods and analytics work to understand some of those statistical scores and, and measures.

But, and then also for my experienced analysts out there listening don't [00:58:00] be like a static analyst, right? As, as I'm guilty of it too, is my products look the same over a long period of time. Bring some new stuff in there. Don't be afraid to take, you know, an online class through I A C A, which is they have a great online course selection to build your skills and excel or mapping or whatever it may be.

. But yeah, I guess just don't be that static analyst. Be looking for ways to incorporate change into your products and your personal skillsets. Nice. All right,

Jason: good. Well, let's talk personal interest cuz as I mentioned in the introduction, you are a firefighter. I am. And I see here that in 2014 you were awarded the Blue Township Fire Department Firefighter of the Year.

So how did you earn

Austin: that? So setting up a little bit, I, I was really interested in the fire and e m s field coming out of high school of all things. And when I went to Kansas State University, I was [00:59:00] itching to look for an opportunity to be involved with the fire department and there was a, a little volunteer fire department.

Just the bedroom community outside of Manhattan, Kansas that had some volunteer positions open. So I applied and just absolutely loved it. It was it, it was a little challenging to balance the school balance with some of the responsibilities there. But you know, I was available to respond to incidents as, as needed and sort of it was a unique dynamic cuz with your college schedule, you're oftentimes available during the day when some folks with full-time jobs are not.

So there were a few times that there was a young group on the fire engine responding, but ultimately I ended up. Responding to somewhere near like 80%

of the total calls of for the entire year. And that stood out in terms of the metrics of staffing and, and just ended up being one of those faces that was around the most and made The most responses out of anyone else.

So that is how [01:00:00] I ended up with that award, which I was incredibly grateful for. That was a sort of a cool validation at the time I was putting in and stuff was somewhat worthwhile. But it's, it was a really fun thing to be involved with and helped me grow professionally and actually set me up really well to be a crime analyst and sort of understand the incident command structure of sort of a well, leaving the fire service and police service, there's a lot of paramilitary mm-hmm.

type structure involved there. And so it's it was a really good background for that. And even to this day moved up to Minnesota, obviously had to drop. That job as I couldn't commute back to Kansas for that, but know just a little bit, right? A little bit of a work commute. But it was a great thing to be involved with through grad school and just kind of have something else other than constantly reading books and, and papers.

But I took a little break to be familiar with my environment up here and was really. Too tempted to, to not be [01:01:00] involved in that anymore. So I, I stumbled upon a part-time firefighter opportunity. And now I, I do that during the nighttime . Oh, really? So that is my that is my job outside of this job that is just, it's incredibly rewarding and it's just too much fun in, in to not be doing that.

So that is that is my hobby, if you will. That consumes most of my time outside of work.

. All right. That's quite

Jason: a moonlighting gig in yes. But to me, my devious mind goes with 80% of the calls. , I might be investigating that firefighter to see if he's the one starting all these fires. Right.

Austin: You know, that's that happens too often and a lot of these small town departments that but you know, it, it.

It was it was weird because this department was it was all volunteers. Like, we didn't have staff throughout the day. So, you know, a lot of these calls come in like medic, they're, most of them were medical calls. They weren't all fires, but would come in during the day when people were at work.

But all the firefighters that were [01:02:00] on that were students of course, were either not in class, skipping class or coming or going to class, and were willing to head on over to respond to that. So it's I think my schedule, I added the unfair advantage of having the students schedule there.

But yeah. Yeah.

Jason: Hmm. All right. And like, no, I, you are a baseball fan and so who's your.

Austin: My team even though I'm in Minnesota surrounded by twins fans, I am a diehard Kansas City Royals fan. And forever will

Jason: be. So. All right. So what's your expectation for 2023?

Austin: , as with most Royals fans, my expectation for 2023 is to be better than 2022 royals.

That is no large expectations there, but just a little bit better than last year. Yeah. But you

Jason: had to run there. You went to two World Series in a row. So that was uh, I know it.

Austin: That was. The heyday back in 2015, but it's been too long and we need to go back, start

Jason: climbing. Very good. All right, well, our last [01:03:00] segment to the show is Words to the World, and this is , where you can promote any idea that you wish.

Austin, what are your words to the world?

Austin: My words to the world would be to continue to be curious, and that sounds, you know, a little open-ended, but you know, whether that be professionally for all the analysts out there or just in. Personalize in, in looking into getting into new hobbies or, or try different things.

The world of an analyst is very stressful, so you need something outside of that to keep the balance. But also within the job to be, to be curious about new ways

to do things, work in different things to your work products, and ultimately give your department leadership new things to make positive impacts in your c.

Jason: Very good. Well, I leave every guest with, you've given me just enough to talk bad about you later, , but I do appreciate you being on the show, Austin. Thank you. Absolutely so much. And you be safe. Likewise. Thank you.

Mindy: Thank you for making it to the end of another episode of Analysts Talk with Jason Elder.

Austin: You can [01:04:00] show your support by sharing this in other episodes found on our website at www.lepodcasts.com. If you have a topic you would like us to cover or have a suggestion for our next guest, please send us an email at elliott.eight.podcast@gmail.com. Till next time, analysts, keep talking.