

FROM RISK TO STORY

A Practitioner's Guide to Narrative Prosocialization

Turning criminogenic needs and responsivity barriers into a hopeful, prosocial vision capable of generating intrinsic motivation for lasting change.

1. The Two-Step Interpretive Move

The instrument tells you what. This two-step interpretive move tells you why.

Every validated risk assessment produces a list of criminogenic needs. The Two-Step Move transforms that list from a profile of deficits into the raw material of a story — and opens the door to a prosocial vision that belongs to the participant, not the program.

Step 1 — Name the Dragon

Identify the risk factor using your validated instrument. Name it accurately and without softening. The instrument doesn't lie. This is what you already do.

Examples: Antisocial associates. Substance dependence. Employment deficits. Antisocial cognition.

Step 2 — Ask Why

Not as excuse — as explanation. What happened in this person's story that bent this domain in this direction?

This question reveals the genuine capacity — the structure that has been aimed at the wrong object.

The key insight: Every risk factor has two layers. The surface layer is the behavior the instrument captures. The deeper layer is a genuine human capacity — loyalty, devotion, courage, belonging — aimed at the wrong object. Step 2 reveals that capacity. Once you can see it, you know what you're building toward, not just what you're treating.

2. From Parallel Deficits to a Single Story

The risk factors are not separate problems. They are expressions of one wound.

When Step 2 is applied across all identified risk factors, a pattern emerges. The substance use, the antisocial companions, the employment instability, the isolation — these are rarely independent failures. They are typically four expressions of a single narrative fracture: a person whose genuine capacities for meaning, belonging, and purpose have lost their organizing object.

Step 2, applied across all identified risk factors, produces the raw material for this next move: contextualization. It assembles the discrete risk findings into a unified story the participant can recognize as their own. It does not minimize the risk findings. It answers the question the instrument cannot:

“What happened to you that organized your life in this direction — and what does that tell us about who you actually are?”

When a participant hears their own story reflected back with accuracy and without condemnation, something shifts that no external pressure can produce. Their suffering acquires meaning. Viktor Frankl documented this from the most extreme circumstances imaginable: it is not the absence of suffering that motivates people toward change. It is the presence of meaning within the suffering.

A participant who understands their pain as random damage has no internal reason to change. A participant who can begin to see their pain as the wound that qualifies them — as the chapter that precedes the turn — has something to move toward that belongs to them. That is the precondition for intrinsic motivation.

3. Constructing the Prosocial Vision

Not a generic better life. A specific, credible destination native to who this person actually is.

The prosocial vision must be built from what Step 2 revealed — or it will feel like an assignment rather than a discovery, and it will not generate intrinsic motivation. A generic vision — “stay sober and get a job” — is still compliance wearing a nicer outfit. It doesn’t belong to the person; it belongs to the program.

Three elements must be present in a vision capable of sustaining lasting change:

- **Vision:** A clear, specific picture of who this person is becoming and toward what end. A picture of a life genuinely worth living — one that connects directly to what this person cares about most deeply. Vision converts external pressure into internal drive. Without it, compliance is the ceiling.
- **Vocation:** A concrete role through which the participant contributes value to others — e.g., parent, mentor, employee, neighbor. Vocation reorients the participant from receiver to giver and gives the new story a place to actually be lived. Without vocation, even a compelling vision eventually collapses back into the old story.
- **Virtue:** The habits and character that allow the participant to stand in their vocation faithfully over time. Virtue cannot be chosen; it must be formed through practice, accountability, and community. It is the slow work — and it is what makes the vision durable rather than fragile.

Vision gives direction. Vocation gives people to serve. Virtue gives the character to stand.

All three are sustained within a community of fellowship, which is why peer mentors matter.

4. The Questions That Plant the Seed

Two questions. One opens the story. One points toward the destination.

These are orientation questions — asked early, returned to often, and planted long before the participant has the answer. Their power is in the asking, not the answering.

“Before all of this, who were you trying to become?”

Opens the story. Signals that you see a person, not a case file. Invites the participant to remember a self that existed before the wound — and connects the present to a prior trajectory that can be recovered and redirected.

“Someday, what will you give?”

Points toward the destination. Shifts the energy source from external accountability to internal purpose. Tells the participant that this journey does not end with their survival — it ends with their service. Plants the Guide identity from the very first session.

Practitioner reflection

Am I acting as the hero of this participant’s story — solving their problems, managing their compliance — or am I the guide helping them right their own? The guide’s job is not to carry the participant. It is to hold up a mirror long enough for them to see that there is a story worth writing — and that they are the one who must write it.

THE PROCESS AT A GLANCE

Step 1	Name the risk factor accurately using a validated instrument.
Step 2	Ask why. Reveal the genuine capacity beneath the misdirection.
Contextualize	Assemble the risk findings into a single unified narrative the participant recognizes.
Build the Vision	Construct a prosocial destination native to who this person actually is.
Plant the Seed (from session one)	Ask the two questions early and return to them often. The goal is authorship, not compliance.