

Case Study: The Closure of Vida Sheffield (1995–2026) previously known as Sheffield Domestic Violence Forum

Vida Sheffield officially announced its permanent closure for August 2026 following a multi-year battle against a highly competitive, unsustainable short-term grant funding environment. Despite an intense community campaign and emergency funding, the **31-year-old domestic abuse charity** could not secure the core funding required to sustain its vital trauma-informed therapeutic services.

This case study explores Vida's operational history, the milestones leading to its final wind-down, and the systemic funding crisis facing small, specialist voluntary organisations in the UK.

1. Background and Organisational Profile

- **Entity Name (charity):** Vida Sheffield (formerly known as the Sheffield Domestic Violence Forum).
- **Founded:** Mid-1990s (Operating for over 31 years).
- **Mission:** following loss of statutory contracts for Domestic Abuse support and helpline in 2015 a therapy programme was developed to fill a gap voiced by survivors. Accreditation was achieved in 2024 by BACP as a specialist trauma therapy, counselling, and recovery services to women and girls who survived domestic abuse, coercive control, and sexual violence.
- **Operational Capacity:** Supported 200 to 250 individuals annually with a core team of 5/6 part-time staff and around 12/20 Associate Therapists, volunteers and trainees.
- **Annual Budget Required:** £290,000 at full capacity – functioned between **£240,000 to £250,000** at a reduced capacity.
- **Demonstrated Impact:** Reported that 5 out of 6 service users stopped experiencing suicidal thoughts, and 6 out of 7 reported reduced depression after receiving care. Vida also estimated it saved the NHS roughly £50,000 per month by relieving pressure on specialist psychotherapy healthcare systems.

2. The Final Chapter: Funding Crisis & Closure

November 2023

First Shortfall Notice: Services at Risk

July 2024

27k+ Petition Presented to Sheffield Council

November 2024

Initial Closing Announcement for March 2025

June 2025

Emergency Grant Package Rescues Operations

June 2026

Final Funding Crisis: Closure Confirmed

August 2026

Permanent Operational Closure

2027

Dissolution and Deregistration

The Initial Warning (2024)

In July 2024, Vida presented a petition with **27,481 signatures** to Sheffield City Council, pleading for emergency core intervention after missing out on several competitive independent grant cycles. The council's Adult Health and Social Care Policy Committee stated it could not directly fund the charity due to its own tight budget constraints. By November 2024, Vida officially announced it would be forced to close by March 2025 as it proved "impossible" to keep up with increasing operational costs on unstable public donations and endless grant applications short-term rounds.

The Temporary Reprieve (2025)

In June 2025, grants received from the Brelms Trust, Lloyds Bank Foundation, Synergy Mental Health Alliance, and the Henry Smith Charity contributed to plugging the **£175,000 deficit** with the National Lottery playing a major part in reviewing their grant too all of which formed an **emergency funding package**. This critical intervention temporarily saved the charity from imminent closure, allowing them to keep their doors open through the 2025/2026 financial year while searching for a long-term solution.

The Final Crisis and Wind-Down (2026)

The emergency funds bought the organisation time, but the underlying issue remained: a lack of ring-fenced, statutory funding from local commissioners or the NHS. In June 2026, Chair Dr Marilyn Gregory announced that Vida had reached a final "crisis point". With no recurring state backing or structural funding available, the trustees made the responsible decision to **permanently close operations at the end of August 2026** with deregistration and dissolution taking place in 2027.

3. Key Issues and Strategic Failures

The Statutory Funding Gap

Vida occupied a unique, complex niche, delivering specialised trauma care that straddled the line between mental health and social services. While the NHS and Sheffield City Council routinely referred victims to Vida, neither provided direct financial support to sustain the pipeline. As documented by the BBC coverage of the closure, council funding is ringfenced for the local Domestic Abuse Strategy (e.g., refuges,

helplines, and general advocates), leaving specialised long-term therapeutic care unfunded.

The Domestic Abuse Commissioners DA Strategic Plan 2026-2029 advocates for better integrated mental health pathways and Vida joined with 90 VAWG organisations during May 2025 to petition the Health & Home Secretaries for £28m investment into the community. There were no new announcements of significant funding since the Home Office VAWG Support & Specialist Services tender process that ended in January 2023. Vida was unable to comply at that time with the complex tender rules and requirements.

The Trap of "Piecemeal" Grants

Vida's operational model relied heavily on short-term project grants. CEO Karen Hague MBE highlighted that seeking funding every single year became an exhausting, unsustainable administrative hurdle for a small team with few resources. When independent trusts pivot their focus or application pools become too congested, small charities lack the cash reserves to bridge multi-month deficits. As a long standing member of Women's Aid (over 30 years) Vida has supported the lobbying of the Government to change the piecemeal funding situation as reported in their Annual Audit 2026: 40% do not receive dedicated funding.

4. Impact of the Closure

- **A Gap in Specialised Care:** Vida was the only dedicated, trauma-focused recovery service provider of its kind in Sheffield. General helplines and refuges offer immediate safety but lack the capacity for extended clinical psychological recovery. The Domestic Abuse Commissioner's strategic plan 2026-2029 highlights that health and specialist services are a top priority.
- **Increased Strain on the NHS:** Displacing over 200 high-risk referrals annually will inevitably funnel vulnerable women back into already overburdened NHS mental health pathways. The SY Integrated Care Board (ICB) has reduced its workforce by almost 50% required by central government. This resulted in staff concentrating on basic contract management and meeting statutory requirements with no significant redesign and implementation of care paths involving the VCSE community partners, in relation to trauma focused mental health support for women.
- **Job Losses:** The closure directly resulted in redundancies for Vida's core staff and ended contracts for its network of Associate Therapists, trainees and volunteers.

5. Conclusion and Lessons Learned

The lifecycle and ultimate closure of Vida Sheffield serves as a stark warning for the UK's third sector. It illustrates that **high performance, clinical efficacy, and overwhelming community support are no longer enough to guarantee a charity's survival.**

For structural public services to last, local authorities and healthcare commissioners must shift away from short-term, competitive bidding models. Instead, they must implement co-commissioned, ring-fenced financial pipelines that properly value specialised voluntary partners as essential public assets.

6. Timeline in 31 years

1995

Sheffield Domestic Violence Forum

Offices with the Probation Service. Maureen Storey leads.

1995 - 1998

'Just Stop It' Public Awareness Campaign

South Yorkshire's Domestic Abuse Public Awareness Campaign. Information sharing across agencies increased.

1999 - 2001

Move to Carver House

First 3 year multi-agency strategy on domestic abuse. **See, Hear, Speak Out** launch event.

2002 - 2005

Rebranding and New Partnerships

Rebranding and opening of London Road office. **DAFFS** and **SPG** began. Domestic Abuse Awareness training took off. Sheffield celebrated 30 yrs of activism.

2006 - 2008

Developing Specialist Services

Launch of 'Step by Step' group tackling DA in South Yorkshire. IDVAS service developed. Training for magistrates introduced. Dr Marilyn Gregory appointed as chair.

2008 - 2010

Move to Knowle House

Sheffield Domestic Abuse Helpline launched. IDVAS pilot project in maternity services.

2011 - 2013

Vida Sheffield Re-established

Eva Therapy Service delivering 1:1 CBT therapy developed by Jane McClaren. IDVAS awarded CAADA Leading Lights Accreditation.

2014 - 2017

Community Recognition

Surveyed 2015 funding crisis thanks to Comic Relief and National Lottery. WAGI Flash Dance for One Billion Rising in the Peace Gardens. Vida Sky Dive!

2018 - 2021

Awareness and Adaptation

Corporate training launch of '**Know the Line**' media campaign. COVID-19 saw the development of online offers and remote support.

2022 - 2026

Final Years

Maureen Storey retires after 27 years. Karen Hague MBE appointed. The service receives **BACP accreditation**. Petition launched to save VIDA reached 27k funding crisis reaches critical levels. The 'Vida Pathway' developed by Jane McClaren gains recognition.

Dissolution/Deregistration in 2027