

## **Freedom!**

Here is a little of our history:

Many years ago a friend of ours who has additional needs went to a nightclub in Southend with four other friends all with additional needs and they were made fun of by other club goers and the staff, they left early in tears and very distraught. Our friends Mum who both myself and Paul (my partner) worked with decided to start a club night for her daughter and her friends. Paul was the DJ there. Our friend moved away and Paul continued with the night until things became sour and Dick DeVigne asked if we would do a night in his venue, so together we created Freedom.

This year on 29th March Freedom will be 5 years old, we have built the night together from nothing to the 250 plus guests that attend. We average 150 a night with 250 plus on special events!

We started out at Dick DeVignes then when covid hit we took the night onto Facebook Live and then Mixcloud from our dining room using a green screen to create a club look. We did this every Wednesday evening, all Bank holiday's, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day & Boxing Day, New Year (we even had all our neighbours and local community join us as well as reaching care facilities locally and as far away as Cornwall and way up north.)

When lockdown eased we reopened but had to move to CoCo's as Dick DeVigne was a casualty of Covid. We stayed at CoCo's for about a year then when Dick DeVignes reopened as Rhythm Room we were more than happy to be asked back. Now we are undergoing a massive transformation into Popworld! The management, Stonegate Group, love Freedom and are very much involved in our night so have helped us to temporarily move into Moo Moo's while the refurbishment is done. For our first two weeks we don't have wheelchair access due to waiting for a part for the lift (they held off the refurb as long as they could but the part is taking ages to come from Germany!) As a gesture of good will are offering wheelchair users free entry for the other three weeks at Moo Moo's.

We have built the night on hard work, contacting and meeting with homes and groups in the area. All money taken on the door is reinvested into the night. During our time we have had Matt Linnen perform, Southend United players attend, tribute acts do a few songs and we often have themed nights with lots of giveaways! Our Christmas snow parties are legendary! On our birthday last year the Mayor came to cut our cake! We have been on BBC Look East TV, BBC Essex, Radio Essex and had features in the Southend Evening Echo.

We celebrate birthdays with Freedom birthday cards and make a fuss on the stage, we have our own merchandise range that is very popular, I print all this myself, mugs, t shirts, teddy bears and so much more! Every Wednesday at 8pm we play the Bob Sinclair song, Freedom, as our anthem as the words are appropriate. We include all the carer's in our nights and even have off duty carer's attend as they love Freedoms!

We have Freedom Ambassadors who help, one was a guest and now has the confidence to train as an SIA doorman and does our door along with the club's doorman, another has built in confidence and DJ's for the middle part of the evening along with our professional DJ, another does our TikTok, and others promotions and helping new guests settle in.

The Freedom Team/Family consists of Paul Gee and myself, Dj Jazzy, Shirley and Moley(Peter). We all have attributes that have helped shape Freedom. Paul is a former nightclub manager & DJ and is still working as a DJ and in events/ conferences events. I am a two times cancer survivor having previously worked in theatres, hotels and latterly in banking, I now work for myself in design and printing as well as running Photoboosts with

Paul. DJ Jazzy is trained in SEN teaching and is a maths teacher, (he is also our nephew in law), Shirley worked for Dick DeVignes and loved Freedom so joined our team and Moley is also a DJ and a carer. We call ourselves the Freedom Family as we have been there for each other and all our guests through all the difficult times during lockdown.

We are so excited for Freedom's future!