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OPINION SHAPERS – By Carolyn Gregory

- OPINION -

Fred the duck happy despite his disability

We used to have a duck named Fred. Fred hurt his leg, broke a wing and became permanently disabled.

Sometimes Fred made it to the pond by himself; sometimes we carried him. He'd splash across the water and make lopsided dives and then haul himself onto the bank when he was through. Fred had a good time being a duck and paddling around with the others, even if he did look a little strange and required extra care.

I still think about Fred every now and then. He was just like the other ducks except for his leg and wing. But maybe he should have had more expert and specialized care. maybe there should have been a Special Pond District (SPD) to maximize his potential through individualized programming and pond placement.

First, Fred could have been evaluated by the SPD to see if he had a disability. Limping, lopsided flapping, or vet records would not be enough. Rather than limiting a diagnosis to identified disabilities, a Special Pond District would thoroughly evaluate Fred's behavior and compare his scores to non-disabled birds to determine the full extent of his disabilities.

It could have found that besides a pronounced lateral rotation of the left leg and a severe wing displacement, Fred scored poorly on a number of motor tests. He was at only the Hatchling Level on the Arctic Tern Developmental Flight Test, and his roosting and perching abilities were at the Egg Stage, as measured by both the Elementary Chicken and Pre-Lark Scales. Fred could have received a formal diagnosis of Physically Impaired.

Poor Fred. We never realized the full extent of his deficiencies because we didn't have a Special Pond District to evaluate and diagnose him.

If we'd had a Special Pond District, officials could have written an Individualized Pond Plan (IPP) for Fred. They could have looked at his evaluation, identified his needs, created a program for him and determined which pond he belonged in. They'd have shown us that Fred needed a lot more help than we gave him to maximize his potential as a bird.

Since tests showed that Fred's present level of functioning was limited in many areas, the SPD would have written goals for him to work toward and give him specific tasks or

objectives to do to reach those goals. In this individualized program, Fred would have been challenged to improve his motor skills.

He could have spent his days practicing paddling without flopping, in the hope that he would do it three out of four trials on five consecutive days. He could have had special therapy to try to improve his perching until he could land on a 2-inch branch 10 feet above the ground with 80 percent accuracy. He could have had a recommendation for placement in an accessible pond where his needs could be met.

Fred never got that kind of planning. We failed to provide therapeutic intervention for a leg and a wing that would get no better and no worse. We just accepted the fact that Fred was a duck, gave him a hand when he needed it and let him go about his business. We never considered shipping him to a separate pond where all the ducks were carried to the water. In our ignorance, we just helped Fred into the pond with his own flock.

We didn't have a Special Pond District to help plan Fred's program. We didn't have a Special Pond District to help determine if Fred's needs could be met in a pond with non-disabled ducks. Fred missed a lot of expert and specialized care. I still think about Fred every now and then. Even with his wing and his leg, I think he was one lucky duck.



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