Greetings and my apologies for you hearing my statements from a written document verses in person. My calendar did not allow me to be present today. I was asked to share my thoughts on how the pathways affect the healthcare industry and the community. To put “real life” into my comments I want to share my personal story so you understand my perception, stance and viewpoint of the pathway work.

I grew up in a small town near the Virginia boarder named Roanoke Rapids. My father was a banker and my mother was a teacher. My parents are older (88 and 84 currently) and tend to be very traditional. In the evenings my mother and I would prepare dinner, clean up after dinner and my Dad would catch up on the news via the TV and newspaper and my Mom would retreat to the back of the house with stacks of papers to grade, grades to be entered in a gradebook and parents to call to discuss the students’ progress or lack thereof. My Mother devoted many, many hours to work in the evenings and it did not go without my notice. This work extended into the weekends as well on occasion.

During my high school years I achieved good grades without a great deal of effort and was fortunate enough to have the privilege of college being an option for me to attend. I do not recall any career exploration in my high school years and the question was which college to attend not what career path you are seeking. Well, I had little influence on career paths, options or opportunities outside of my family so going on what I had experienced I opted to attend ECU and go into business. I mean, think about this for a minute. Would you want to catch up on world news or grade papers, call parents etc.? So I get myself registered for some business classes straight out the gate in my first semester. What I discovered was college and high school are different, I was homesick and those classes were really hard. I made a 1.9 that semester and my parents were NOT happy. That was a stressful Winter break. So, being the hard-headed individual that I am, I returned second semester very determined to do better and continue on my course. That semester I met Business Statistics and to save you some time I brought home a 1.7 that semester. At that point my parents were frustrated and at a loss of what to do with me. I was frustrated, beat down, confused, lost and scared. The negative talk I offered myself was horrific. I distinctly remember the feelings of having let both my parents and myself down and not knowing how to pull up from that. So it was at this point I truly believe God intervened and led my parents to get me to the Career Counseling Center at ECU where I started with an aptitude test to define my interest. Easiest test ever!!! So, I get the test results back and find that out of every degree ECU offers I had selected the last degree I should have ever considered. I must admit given my current profession this is amusing and confirms my thoughts that people can grow and change. The test identified me as a “people person” and provided a list of professions that I may want to consider: Nursing, PT, OT, Social Work, Speech Therapist, etc. I had no experience, no exposure and no knowledge of any of the suggested options. I had rational such as, “OK….nursing…….well, I don’t really like blood and if you throw up I will probably throw up too. So, NO to nursing”. I had no idea what PT or OT was or did and as ashamed as I am to openly admit it, I ruled out Speech Therapy because I already knew how to talk. How embarrassing! Again, I believe I had divine intervention and I selected Social Work. I like people and I like to help people. So back for my third semester; registered for Social Work classes. It was a different world for me. The classes made sense. The work was easy and very natural. I was engaged. I was happy. I started to make friends and fit into ECU. I started having fun. I had truly found my path and it felt so, so good. My grades you ask? Excellent! I did so well in the Social Work classes I had two professors seeking me to attend graduate school as an advanced standing Social Work student. I did attend as Advanced Standing and my master’s paper was worthy of being published. I continued on through supervised practice and a state exam to get my license as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker. I worked in the Social Work field four years’ pre-masters and post masters for 17 years. I am proud of much of that work and the opportunities it offered to support other humans. I also believe the skill sets that profession created in me allowed me to step into my current position of Workforce Development. I believe the story I just shared gave me passion and drive to assure other individuals have opportunities to explore options verses walking the path I did. I am reminded not everyone has the support I had, nor the resources and guidance.

So, what does that story have to do with the Pathway work? Everything. The pathway work can offer a tool to assure no other individuals have to walk the same story I have and potentially be lost. The pathway can offer guidance and opportunities to a large audience of individuals as well as those who support them such as counselors, CDC’s, parents/guardians, family members, teachers, individuals in the community and so forth. The pathway work allowed both the educational systems and business/industry to communicate…..learn about each other…….look at similarities and differences and create a written document that offers options and guidance. The work we all did to set up a written path for individuals could provide direction and insight that would not be available otherwise. The pathways have suggestions for a variety of exposure events so students see first-hand and hear from the professionals themselves verses just reading about it……..or not hearing anything………or not knowing anything…..and possibly being lost and misguided. The pathways encourages rigor in the course work so we have competent individuals to select from to fill the work-force. The pathway is a door to business, industry and educational institutions at all levels to continue to work together to achieve an integrated strategy of connecting talented job seekers to employers.

How can the pathways help the healthcare industry? It can provide education and exposure on the many opportunities and career choices in healthcare. Many times when individuals think of healthcare they only consider doctors and nurses. The reality is, of course we need doctors and nurses, but there are LOTS of opportunities in healthcare besides those two professions. Better informed individuals who know the reality of the profession verses an assumption, perception or media driven portrayal can lend to better Team Members and the knowledge can save an individual an enormous amount of time, effort, energy and money to make an informed selection of a career.

You can pick up any paper or magazine as well as listen or read from the media the challenges healthcare is currently facing. Healthcare is being asked to be more strategic in the care provided with less funding. Healthcare is being held accountable for the outcomes of the people served. Healthcare is at the center of many political debates. Healthcare is being asked to provide both well care and sick care with a focus on providing access to care in the community verses people needing to travel. Healthcare is being asked to care for a much sicker population than ever before. I can go on with challenges. In the meantime, the baby boomers are aging which will lessen the workers and increase the consumers of the system and despite the numbers going into healthcare we are still projecting shortages of critical positions.

Suggestions for the future? I suggest the following:

* Develop a strategy to share the pathways with entire communities and assure they are understood
* Develop a strategy to not just share the pathway and assure it is understood, but to also make it so convenient and easy it becomes part of the norm to utilize it.
* Share this work with other regions instead of everyone trying to create a tool. They can customize the existing work to meet the needs of that region.
* Assure the pathways stay current as changes occur. The work does not end at the creation, it must be maintained.
* Use this tool to expand the work between educational institutions and business and industry. The partnership is critical. Educational institutions educate the future workforce. Business and industry need the employees. It should be a symbiotic relationship to help create the best prepared workforce and worker as possible.

Despite that is only 5 bullet points that is an incredible amount of work that requires strategic planning and deployment. The work is just beginning………..

So, again, I apologize I was not able to be here today in person. I do hope my story and thoughts on the pathway work was both relevant and inspirational to you. Hopefully I will see all of you as we continue this body of work.

Have a great day!