Southwire is a privately held wire and cable manufacturer headquartered in Georgia whose commitment to improving the communities in which it operates has put it on the leading edge of education initiatives for decades. With high school dropout rates approaching 30 percent around Southwire’s western Georgia facilities, the company partnered with Carroll County Schools to examine how they could help. In 2007, they launched 12 for Life – a program that lets students combine their studies with practical real-world experience at a customized Southwire manufacturing facility. Through contextualized work-based learning, a robust support system, and a paycheck, Southwire’s 12 for Life program gives at-risk students a pathway to success by completing 12 years of school while meeting Southwire’s high production standards and filling the company’s talent needs.

**Business Outcomes**
- Continues the company’s tradition of giving back to the community and increasing their qualified workforce.
- 12 for Life graduates are encouraged to stay on as interns and attend college. There are currently 20 student interns. Thirty-nine percent of graduates have gone on to post-secondary education.
- Increase in trained, motivated workforce. Fifteen percent of graduates have been hired as full-time Southwire employees.

**Employee Impact**
- Students are paid $8/hour with an opportunity to earn an additional $1/hour based on productivity and attendance.
- Due to 12 for Life’s life skills training, all students have on-site access to file their own tax returns.

**Program Outcomes**
- Currently, 667 students have received their high school diplomas. The new target is 800 graduates by the end of 2014.
- The overall graduation rate in the Carroll County Schools system has increased by approximately 10 percent since the inception of 12 for Life. In addition, the graduation rate for economically disadvantaged students has increased over twenty-one percent.

Learn and Earn: Specially Designed Facility & Curriculum Promote Work/School Balance and Make Learning Relevant

The 12 for Life program allows students to combine a four-hour shift at a specially designed plant, with a work schedule built around their academic class requirements. The program runs three shifts between 8:30am and 9:30pm, and Carroll County Schools uses their open campus night school to accommodate this schedule.

At the 12 for Life plant, students rotate among workstations so they gain experience in the entire manufacturing process. They also earn two high school credits per semester. Because the workers are students, Southwire has made some modifications in the plant and processes; however, the plant functions like other production facilities. Materials the students manufacture wind up at large distributors across the country, part of a stream of Southwire products that supply wiring to one in three new homes in the United States.
“Southwire has a very broad point of view as to what success means, and it’s not just defined by dollars and cents. It’s also defined by how we impact the lives around us.”
— Stu Thorn, Southwire President and CEO

Close Partnership with Carroll County Schools

The 12 for Life program is made possible by a close partnership between Southwire and the Carroll County Schools. Through close communication, the partners collaborate to ensure the program maximizes the success of students. The Carroll County Schools, which understands Southwire’s systems, processes, and products, selects 12 for Life participants, manages onsite instruction, transportation, and facilitates students’ postsecondary placement. The school system also tracks student progress and program success. For its part, Southwire has invested more than $2.5 million in 12 for Life, providing facilities, equipment, tutors, and most importantly, jobs. Southwire is committed to expanded support for 12 for Life in part because the program, even with additional expenditures, is sustainable.

STEM Education at 12 for Life

12 for Life offers STEM-related education (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) in an innovative, high-impact, applied learning setting as part of the Georgia Race to the Top Innovation Fund project sponsored through the Georgia Governor’s Office of Student Achievement. The Carroll County School System was awarded a $1 million grant for 12 for Life to implement the project. Through the grant, 12 for Life has enhanced instruction by providing advanced academic opportunities to students traditionally underrepresented in STEM education. A key component of this project has been Southwire’s in-kind contribution of a Quality Assurance Lab combined with a traditional chemistry lab. Over 300 products packaged at 12 for Life as well as competitor product samples are collected for students to evaluate, cross compare, and record in a computer program designated specifically to the 12 for Life facility. Another initiative engages students in the process of inventory management through the Raw Materials Warehouse where materials are received, managed and shipped.

Student-Focused Academic, Professional Development, and Life Skills Curriculum

12 for Life students participate in contextualized classroom instruction, on-the-job training, and a life skills development initiative. Working from individualized instruction plans, the curriculum focuses on instilling a strong work ethic through responsibility, teamwork, communication, attitude, and other important workplace skills.

Forty Southwire employees – ranging from vice presidents to engineers – volunteer to provide one-on-one mentoring to students. These employee mentors work with on-site managers and school representatives to form a support system designed to encourage the 12 for Life students and make their success possible. For those students who need assistance academically, Southwire provides incentives for tutors, brings in additional resources to help students prepare for their high school graduation exam, and provides opportunities for summer school.

Sustainability and Expansion

12 for Life has been successful for the students and for Southwire. For the company, 12 for Life is self-sustaining. The facility does some of the same work as Southwire’s other plants, and productivity rates are high. The 12 for Life program is also a talent source: Southwire has hired 15 percent of the program graduates as full-time employees.

12 for Life has had a marked impact on its students and the local community. The overall graduation rate in Carroll County has increased approximately 10 percent since the program began, while 39 percent of graduates have moved on to postsecondary education – a number Southwire considers very successful since 12 for Life participants are selected in part because they are likely to drop out of high school. Other students have entered the workforce better prepared than they would have been without the program.

The program’s success spurred Southwire to expand 12 for Life to include Heard County schools in Georgia and, in 2009, to add a second facility near Florence, Alabama. Southwire has developed an alliance with the Georgia State Government’s Great Promise Partnership (GPP) to support organizations to adopt the 12 for Life model in their communities, and also partnered with HON, an office furniture company, located in Cedartown, GA, and the Georgia Department of Corrections to create a program in their Monroe County facility. Southwire is currently discussing additional expansion, including partnering with smaller manufacturers.

“I would help create more 12 for Lives […] because it’s helped me so much.” — Devin Williams

Background Information

For more information about Southwire’s 12 for Life program, please visit www.12forlife.com

ABOUT Southwire

• Manufacturer
• Operations throughout North America
• 7,500 employees

Southwire Company, LLC is North America’s leading manufacturer of wire and cable used in the distribution and transmission of electricity. Throughout its history, the company has sought to help provide power through its products, its service and by helping empower its customers, employees and communities.

For more information, please visit www.southwire.com

ABOUT THE EMPLOYMENT PATHWAYS PROJECT

The project is catalyzing a national effort to “flip the switch” on employer demand for opportunity youth - young adults ages 16 to 24 who are out of school and work. The project works to harness the power of the private sector so that employers play an active role in developing new sources of skilled talent.

For more information, please visit www.employmentpathwaysproject.org

“[12 for Life has] helped so many people. […] It got me off the street, helped me have somewhere to live, and especially take care of my son.” — Michael McCormick