

# Southwire

**SOUTHWIRE'S DEDICATION TO IMPROVE THE EDUCATION AND SKILL LEVEL OF THEIR EMPLOYEES PROMPTS CREATION OF 12 FOR LIFE, A ONE OF A KIND PROGRAM TO HELP AT-RISK YOUTH GRADUATE FROM HIGH SCHOOL AND MAKE SUCCESSFUL TRANSITIONS TO WORK AND POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION.**

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. Twenty-one percent of graduates have been hired as full-time Southwire employees.

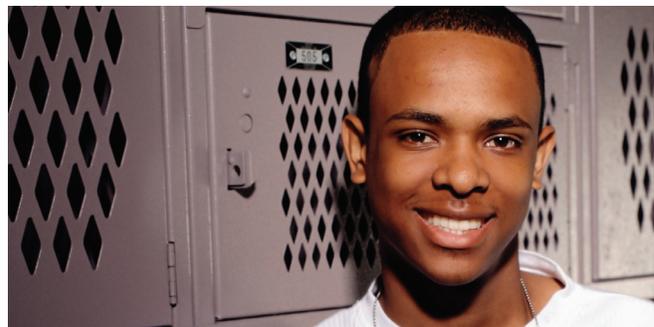
## Employee Impact

- » 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, 15 percent of students filed their own tax returns in 2008.

## Program Outcomes

- » Surpassed goal of 175 graduates by 2012. Currently, 192 students have received their high school diplomas. The new target is 400 graduates by 2013.
- » The overall graduation rate in the Carroll County Schools system has increased by approximately 10 percent since the inception of 12 for Life.

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## 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 an additional four hours of school. 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.

**“ [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

### **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. 12 for Life also uses WorkKeys to measure critical workforce skills. Working from individualized instruction plans, the curriculum focuses on instilling a strong work ethic through responsibility, teamwork, communications, and attitude, along with 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 hires 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 21 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 gone up about 10% since the program began, while 39% 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 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 second facility near Florence, Alabama. They have also partnered with 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 Lifes [...] because it’s helped me so much.”**

– Devin Williams

### **About Southwire**

- Manufacturer
- Operations throughout North America
- 4,000 employees

### **About Corporate Voices**

Corporate Voices is the leading national business membership organization representing the private sector on public and corporate policy issues involving working families. A nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, we improve the lives of working families by developing and advancing innovative policies that reflect collaboration among the private sector, government and other stakeholders.

[www.corporatevoices.org](http://www.corporatevoices.org)

### **Find Out More**

This case study was funded, in part, by the Kellogg Foundation’s New Options Initiative, which seeks out, strengthens and partners with innovative community organizations, businesses, education institutions and municipal governments to create a new credentialing system to prepare young people for work or further education.

For more information, please visit [www.wkcf.org](http://www.wkcf.org).

