

# Carrier Transicold assists at-risk Georgia youth through its Great Promise Partnership

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At Carrier Transicold's manufacturing operation in Athens GA, a commitment to helping the community is providing at-risk teens with real-world work experience while giving employees one-to-one mentoring opportunities. It's a combination with promising results for the plant and community.

The basis of this initiative is the plant's participation in the Georgia Department of Community Affairs' Great Promise Partnership, a program that enables businesses to help students through workplace skills development and goal achievement. Students who commit to graduating from high school are promised support that helps them prepare for the workforce, further education, or military service after graduation.

Carrier Transicold's student participants, who have ranged in age from 16 to 18, attend classes for half a day and work the other half in regular positions on the production floor helping to build subassemblies for transport refrigeration systems, such as the Vector and X4 trailer refrigeration units and Supra and X Series truck refrigeration units. They are paid competitive wages and receive work-study credits while developing valuable skills.

Athens' first six student employees started in January 2015, and all graduated high school that spring. Over the summer, another five Great Promise Partnership juniors and seniors started at the facility, and an additional seven were hired in autumn.

"We considered the opportunity to participate in the program an ideal fit with our commitment of supporting the community and helping to develop the workforce of tomorrow," said Matt Walker, plant manager, Carrier Transicold, "I'm proud that our employees have embraced this program and taken the opportunity to engage with students on multiple levels, from being a mentor to a co-worker helping the students develop their skills.

"The need in Georgia is very real," Walker said. "Although the national high school dropout rate has been declining for decades, Georgia has one of the lower high school graduation rates in the country. Our program participants could have added to those statistics, but instead they earned their diplomas, filled roles in the factory, and used their skills to add value to the operation while they are learning."



**At Carrier Transicold's Athens plant, Great Promise Partnership program participant Naomy Huaman, a senior from Clarke Central High School, prepares insulation for trailer refrigeration units while Supervisor Cedric Richardson offers support.**

To participate in the Great Promise Partnership, students must be at least 16, eligible for free or reduced school lunches, and identified by counselors as at risk of not graduating.

“These are good kids that have struggled for various reasons. Most are very much involved with their families,” said Emily Michelbach, manager, human resources at the Athens plant. “They make the choice to work at the plant half a day and go to school half a day. It’s a partnership between us, the families, and the schools.”

With that in mind, the Athens operation starts each work season with a kick-off presentation for student recruits, their families, employees, school officials, and local government representatives.

“We want to make sure the parents and guardians are comfortable and understand what we do, and that they can relate to our environment here,” Michelbach said. “Not everyone is familiar with today’s manufacturing. It’s a clean, nice, safe environment.”

Mentoring is a key facet of the program. In addition to having a supervisor, every participant is paired with a peer mentor, a fellow employee who volunteered and was subsequently trained to serve in a coaching role.

“Our mentors do an amazing job with these students,” Michelbach said. “They’re helping them to graduate from high school, and encouraging a better future. We’re also helping our employees—and we’re helping our company, because we’re attracting better candidates for our open positions.”

Employees have embraced the program, some taking on unofficial mentoring roles for the students. “It’s a point of pride for the plant,” Michelbach said, “because we’re supporting our community, which in turn helps our employees.”

Karen Bond, an assembler and a 28-year employee, worked alongside one of the female students from the Great Promise Partnership.

“I really enjoyed it,” she said. “Every young person deserves a chance. So many companies say, ‘We can’t hire you because you don’t have experience.’ Well, we’re giving them the experience—and I think that’s awesome.”

It’s also rewarding for the students. “We’re training good workers who really have pride in what they’re doing and have pride in the company,” said Michelbach. “They love to go out and tell their friends, ‘I work at Carrier Transicold.’ That’s really cool for a 16-year-old to be able to say.”