**Hassan Alkhawam, Rising Star**

**When Hassan Alkhawam, aged 23, and his family fled their home in Syria due to the war, they were given refugee status and rehomed in Northern Ireland in 2017. Since arriving in the country Hassan has transformed his life, he is now studying Software Engineering at university and has been a key worker in Tesco during the Covid 19 pandemic.**

Before coming to Northern Ireland, Hassan’s father became ill and was no longer able to work, meaning Hassan had to leave full-time education and get a job to support the family. When he arrived in Northern Ireland Hassan wanted to return to education and fulfil his dream of going to university but needed to take an English language course before he could apply.

At the time Hassan was not working and didn’t have money to pay for the course. A friend told him about The Prince’s Trust and Hassan got in touch to see if they could help.

“I knew that taking the English language course was the first step to being able to apply for a job and university, but with no income I didn’t have a way to pay for it. The Prince’s Trust were able to provide me with a Development Award that covered the fees, I was so grateful for their help. As well as providing the money, the support and encouragement from the staff was amazing.”

While he was waiting to apply for university, Hassan wanted to get a job to help support himself. He took part in The Prince’s Trust Get into Retail programme with Tesco, a training scheme that gives young people the skills, confidence and practical experience at Tesco, to find a job.

After completing the four-week programme he was offered a job and started working there just before the pandemic began.

“I found the programme really interesting; I think it is a great opportunity. Everyone was amazing and I was delighted to be offered a job at the end of it.

“I’ve been working there for nine months now, right through the Covid-19 pandemic. The stores have been busy, but it feels good to be helping during this difficult time.

“It is great to be earning money and living independently, I’ve made lots of new friends and am proud to work for Tesco. I also was accepted to university and started my course in Software Engineering at Queens in September. I’m grateful to The Prince’s Trust for all their support in helping me achieve a better life, not just for me, but for my family.”

As well as working part time and studying, Hassan is a voluntary Director of a local charity that supports vulnerable members of the refugee and migrant communities in Northern Ireland.

**See press release: https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/about-the-trust/initiatives/national-princes-trust-awards/rising-star-award**