

# Service Dog Supports Student's Journey Toward Medical School

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As Ashburn resident Kate Madlin looks ahead to graduating high school and beginning college this fall, she is stepping into a future filled with ambition, and now, with a trusted partner by her side. Madlin currently attends Briar Woods High School.

Living with Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome, Madlin manages daily challenges that can limit energy and endurance, especially during long days and periods of standing or walking.

These limitations have shaped how she moves through school and life, but they have not defined her goals.

With the support of Cork, a specially trained black Labrador from KSDS Assistance Dogs, Inc., Madlin is preparing to pursue them more fully than ever before.

Raised by Kansas State University veterinary student Kylie Bitcon of Manhattan, Kansas, Cork has been intentionally bred, socialized, and professionally trained to assist individuals with physical conditions like Madlin's. His role is grounded in trust, precision, and quiet support, helping Madlin conserve energy, navigate environments safely, and move through her day with greater confidence.

"Cork has made me more confident," said Madlin. "He's helped me feel like I can do anything I want with him by my side."

That confidence comes at a pivotal time. Madlin, a senior in high school, will graduate in June 2026 before heading to Duquesne University in

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where she plans to major in health science with the goal of attending medical school and becoming a physician.

On a campus known for its hills and busy pace, Cork's presence will be essential, not just for mobility, but for endurance and peace of mind. Whether navigating between classes or managing long academic days, Madlin will have a partner trained to support her.

Cork is also expertly trained for the rhythms of academic life. Having already attended classes alongside his puppy raiser at Kansas State University, he is accustomed to settling quietly for extended periods, often unnoticed, but always working.

That seamless integration allows Madlin to focus on her education, her goals, and the experiences that come with college life.

"I'm really looking forward to going to college with him," she said.

Beyond the physical support, Cork brings something equally meaningful, a sense of freedom, where limitations feel smaller and possibilities feel within reach—a future where she can pursue her dream of becoming a doctor.

As she prepares for this next chapter, Madlin isn't just heading to college, she's stepping into it with a partner who will walk beside her every step of the way.

KSDS Assistance Dogs, Inc. is a nonprofit organization dedicated to transforming lives by providing expertly trained guide, service, and facility dogs to individuals and professionals.

