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## O9 Ambassadors for wellbeing: a new role for commercial dog walkers

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### Introduction

Commercial Dog Walkers (CDW) allow people to benefit from the Human-Animal Bond (HAB), who might otherwise be unable to give a dog adequate care or exercise due to employment or disability.

However, exercising multiple dogs for payment in public spaces is increasingly perceived as undesirable. Consequently public authorities are incrementally imposing restrictions on CDW activity, without due regard to wider detrimental impacts on the HAB, nor the opportunities for CDW to act as ambassadors and educators for enhanced human and canine wellbeing.

### Method

To investigate their potential to support the HAB in Scotland, UK, CDW were invited to 1 of 6, 3-hour evening workshops that included presentations by local veterinarians and other dog-friendly, environmentally-aware speakers, plus facilitated discussion sessions. Incentivised pre- and post-event, anonymous online questionnaires elicited quantitative and qualitative data from the 116 workshop attendees about business practices, environmental awareness and advocacy.

### Results

After the event, using free text answers, 81% of CDW responding ( $n=55$ ) placed the highest priority on personally taking actions that supported human/canine wellbeing or wider pro-environmental behaviour, with 84% more able to advise clients on responsible dog walking and ownership. 55% stated it was important for CDW to become involved in advocacy schemes that supported the HAB, with 44% seeking an active role in such initiatives.

### Conclusion

This preliminary study confirms previously unexplored environmental, social and welfare advantages arising from a more holistic approach to influencing CDW behaviour, and their potential to support human and canine wellbeing.