



DESIGNING FOR WELLBEING STUDY

POWERED BY SMITHGROUP



ABSTRACT

When we designed The Current South Shore, our goal was to **enhance the mental, physical, and social wellbeing of its residents, caregivers, and their families**. Now that The Current South Shore is majority occupied, it was an ideal time to revisit and assess how well our design intentions are being fulfilled. The 'Designing for Wellbeing' Study is a multi-phase post occupancy engagement study that directly engages residents, their families, and their caregivers to learn about their experiences living and working at The Current South Shore. The study assessed success across eight dimensions of wellbeing: health & safety, comfort & function, convenience & access, social connection, connection to nature, independence, choice & adaptability, and beauty & delight. Study insights aim to inform future design and operations decisions, to elevate the quality of life and wellbeing in Senior Living Residences. We further hope this study offers the residents, families, and caregivers of The Current South Shore a chance to collectively reflect on the aspects they cherish about their new community.

Through 5 site visits, 60 surveys and over 700 comments these five key insights emerge:

KEY ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS about the CURRENT SOUTH SHORE'S DESIGN

1. **Diverse Social Spaces Enable Choice and Inclusion** | A variety of common areas—from intimate reading nooks to bustling bars and flexible multi-purpose rooms—allows residents to customize their social engagement level. This "choose as much or as little" approach accommodates different personalities, energy levels, and preferences, creating an inclusive environment where everyone can find their place in the community.
2. **Seamless Integration Creates Community Without Stigma** | The Current's breakthrough integration of Independent Living, Assisted Living, and Memory Care eliminates physical and visual barriers, allowing residents to age in place while maintaining relationships and reducing stigma. This model supports both operational efficiency for staff and social continuity for residents, proving that senior communities can serve diverse care needs without segregation.
3. **Aesthetics Drive Pride and Wellbeing** | Bright, modern design that avoids institutional appearance bolsters pride among residents who eagerly share their community with family. Natural light, quality finishes, and thoughtful details like the Memory Care Garden become recruitment tools while supporting daily mental health and creating spaces residents describe as "joyful" and "beautiful."
4. **Flexible Design Supports Evolving Communities and Personal Style** | The community embraces novelty and resident-driven modifications which support stronger ownership and satisfaction. Moveable furniture allows diners to sit in large groups and acoustic partitions separate the multipurpose room from the dining room. As a staff member stated - "Just like no two residents are the same, no two apartments are the same. Everyone is different here".
5. **Design With Users, Not Just for Them** | Traditional senior living design involves mostly leadership, but our study shows that including residents and staff from the start improves results. For example, leadership aimed for caregivers to be more accessible to residents, but placing the administrative suite too close affected privacy and respite. Resident and staff suggestions could enhance experience with minimal additional cost - e.g., pet relief areas, use of serveries, hallway seating, and switch-operated lights.

BACKGROUND

Study Objectives

The Designing for Wellbeing Study aimed to evaluate how The Current South Shore's design enhances the mental, physical, and social wellbeing of residents, caregivers, and their families. As a collaboration between SmithGroup and Monarch Communities, the study sought to:

- Assess design performance against original intentions after majority occupancy.
- Evaluate how the community supports wellbeing across eight dimensions.
- Generate actionable insights to inform future senior living design and operations.
- Provide residents, families, and caregivers opportunity for collective reflection on their community.

Methods

The study employed a comprehensive mixed-methods approach conducted over the summer of 2025:

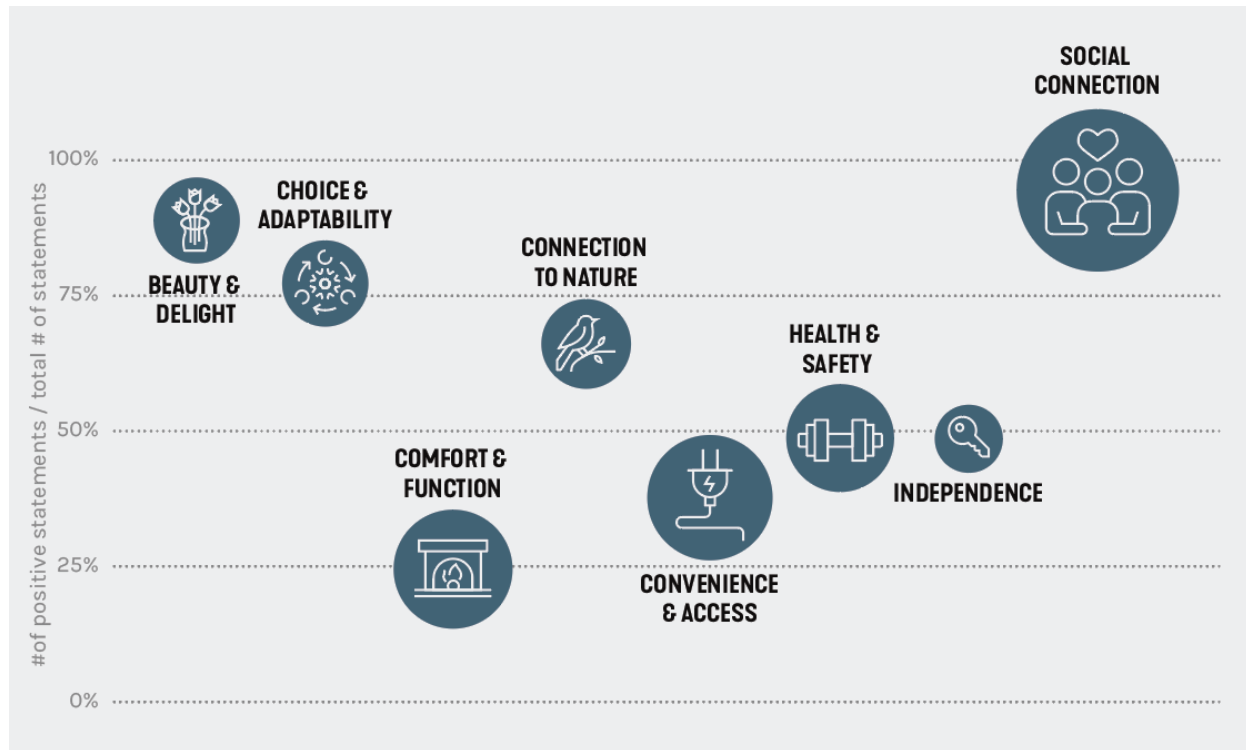
- Site visits include a walkthrough and discussions with leadership, residents and staff.
- Email-based surveys distributed to families, residents, and staff.
- Three in person visits to assist residents with survey completion.
- QR-based "Snapshot Surveys" to capture real-time experiences in common areas
- Final presentation and discussion session to validate findings.
- Analysis combining descriptive statistics for quantitative responses with content analysis of qualitative feedback.

Measures of Success: Eight Dimensions of Wellbeing

We organized our design intent and goals around 8 dimensions of wellbeing:



WHAT'S SUCCESSFUL across EIGHT WELLBEING MEASURES:



Throughout the study, we collected 704 statements from residents, caregivers, families, and leadership about the Current South Shore. We organized these reflections by whether they were positive, negative, or neutral, and relative to the eight measures of success. This chart illustrates both the total number of statements (bubble size) and percent positivity (y-axis).

Health & Safety

The fitness areas, including gym and yoga studio, successfully foster healthier routines with regular classes, a range of programming, and personal fitness assistance. In residential units, 88% of residents confirm bathrooms provide adequate grab bars for safe use.

Comfort & Function

The Current achieves exceptional home-like feeling with residents stating - "It feels like home," "better than home," and "every day I feel more at home." Multi-purpose rooms excel at supporting diverse activities from bingo and movies to lectures and exercise classes. The bar and lobby serve as central, well-located social anchors that residents and families treat "like mom's home for the holidays." Residential kitchens expand function beyond light cooking to entertaining, laundry, and desk workspace.

Convenience & Access

Short hallway designs reduce walking distances for residents and caregivers. The beauty salon, bar, dining rooms, and fitness center provide valued on-site amenities eliminating need for outside transport. Regular scheduled outings provide opportunities for engagement

and enrichment. As most residents do not drive, the commuter rail access and concierge car service support residents' independence for appointments and errands.

Social Connection

Social connection emerges as The Current's greatest strength with 94% of nearly 200 comments positive in nature. The diversity of common spaces—from the quiet Horizon reading room to the bustling bar and dining areas—allows residents to "choose as much or as little involvement as they want." Chance encounters in the lobby, at mailboxes, or dining areas complement planned programming.

Connection with Nature

Outdoor spaces such as the courtyard support peaceful retreats for casual relaxation, yoga, and reading as well as organized social events like BBQs and mocktail hour. The bright, sunlit interior atmosphere is widely appreciated by residents, staff, and families – “on a sunny day, it’s just gorgeous”. The Memory Care Garden with diverse plantings and birdhouses is a favorite meeting area and a showpiece for recruitment tours.

Independence

The seamless integration of Independent Living, Assisted Living, and Memory Care represents a unique success, with no physical or aesthetic distinction that reduces stigma and supports aging in place. IL and AL dining integration allows residents to choose where to eat, preserving friendships and lifestyle continuity. Hydration stations, in-unit grab bars, and on-site amenities support self-reliance that meets the diverse abilities of residents.

Choice & Adaptability

Flexible design shines through continuously adapted furniture arrangements, with square dining tables easily rearranged for large groups. Multi-purpose rooms successfully accommodate changing needs "all day" for lectures, crafts, games, and fitness with effective use of an acoustic partition. The culture embraces novelty and repurposing, as seen in creative plaza use for food trucks and farmers markets and the conversion of the art room into a library.

Beauty & Delight

The Current consistently receives praise for its "light, bright, and clean aesthetic" described as "beautiful," "like a fancy hotel," and "joyful." The Horizon room with floor-to-ceiling windows and sunset views becomes a standout showpiece regularly featured on tours. Residents feel pride in bringing family to visit, noting the modern, non-institutional feel. Memory Care benefits from the same high-quality design aesthetic, reinforcing integration and dignity.