

**GroovAbility: A Visual-Guided
Fitness System to Improve Motor Skills in
Neurodiverse Children**

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Table of Contents

1. Abstract.....	6
2. Introduction.....	7
2.1 Context.....	7
2.2 The Problem.....	7
2.3 GroovAbility as a Solution.....	8
2.4 Objectives.....	9
2.5 Inspiration.....	10
3. Background.....	11
3.1 Ongoing Challenges in Neurodiverse Fitness.....	11
3.2 Fitness Research: Evidence-Based Analysis for Neurodiverse Children.....	12
3.3 Related Work.....	16
4. Timeline and Plan.....	18
5. Innovation.....	21
6. Selection of Approach.....	23
7. Challenges Faced.....	25

8. Methodology.....	26
8.1 Research and Preliminary Study.....	26
8.2 Dataset Creation and Curation.....	26
8.3 Application Design and Technical Framework.....	27
8.4 Tools, Software, and Materials Used.....	28
8.5 Iterative Refinement and Evaluation.....	28
9. App Flow, Screens and Implemented Features.....	29
9.1 Register Screen (First-Time Setup).....	29
9.2 Personal Needs Selection Screen.....	30
9.3 Home Screen.....	31
9.4 Challenges and Tasks Page.....	32
9.5 Exercises Page and Prop Exercises Page.....	33
Prop Exercises Page.....	34
9.6 Exercise Screen.....	35
9.7 Profile Screen.....	36
9.8 App UI Pictures.....	36
10. Local Data Storage.....	40
11. Resource Management.....	41
12. Validation and Testing.....	42
13. Results.....	49
14. Discussion.....	50
15. Conclusion.....	51
16. Acknowledgements.....	54
17. Bibliography.....	55

1. Abstract

Children with neurodevelopmental conditions such as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Down syndrome, Williams syndrome, and Noonan syndrome often experience motor delays, sensory sensitivities, and limited access to inclusive fitness resources. These challenges reduce participation in physical activity and affect overall health, confidence, and well-being. GroovAbility was developed as an offline, sensory-friendly fitness platform designed to address these barriers through evidence-based exercise routines, visual guidance, and gamified motivation.

The project draws on extensive research in motor development, cognitive engagement, and behavioral reinforcement in neurodiverse populations. A curated dataset of safe, structured exercises - including warm-ups, body-part routines, dance-based movements, and prop-assisted activities - was created using physiotherapy and occupational therapy guidelines. Each activity is demonstrated through simple, repetitive cartoon animal GIFs to support visual learning and reduce cognitive load. Gamification elements such as badges, streaks, and progress tracking promote motivation, routine formation, and independent participation.

The app is built using Flutter and Dart, all data is saved locally, for privacy and offline access. It was validated through iterative testing with educators and neurodiverse students at URJA Special Centre and Sunrise Special Learning School where feedback was used to refine exercise pacing, navigation, visual cues, and usability. Initial testing showed a high level of engagement, increased willingness to engage in physical activity, and positive responses to the visual guidance and reward system within the app.

The tests showed high user engagement, greater willingness to do physical activity and positive feedback to the visual guidance and reward system of the app. Teachers also reported that the simplified interface and structured exercise routines were easy for kids to follow with little assistance. These findings suggest that GroovAbility could be an accessible and practical fitness tool for neurodiverse children in the home, school and therapy settings.

GroovAbility demonstrates how inclusive technology, guided by behavioral science and sensory-adaptive design, can make fitness accessible, enjoyable, and developmentally beneficial for neurodiverse children. The project highlights the potential for offline, child-centric digital interventions to support motor growth, emotional regulation, and long-term wellness in diverse learning environments.

Keywords: Neurodiverse Fitness, Assistive Technology, Gamification, Sensory-Friendly Design, Motor Skill Development, Offline Mobile Application, Inclusive Technology, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Down Syndrome, Behavioural Reinforcement, Flutter Development

2. Introduction

2.1 Context

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) affects around 1 in 100 children worldwide, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). Additionally, developmental disabilities affect hundreds of millions of children worldwide altogether. In India, it is estimated that there are more than 10 million children with neurodevelopmental conditions, including autism, Down syndrome, intellectual disability and other developmental disorders. Although many people need specialised support, there are not many inclusive physical activity programs.

Physical activity is a crucial component of child development, supporting cardiovascular health, muscle strength, gross motor skills, coordination, attention, and emotional resilience. However, neurodiverse children often have lower physical fitness levels than their neurotypical peers because of barriers unique to their conditions. For example:

- Children with Down syndrome often face hypotonia and joint laxity, affecting balance and endurance.
- Children with ASD may experience sensory overload from noisy, crowded, or bright environments.
- Children with Williams or Noonan syndrome may struggle with fatigue or coordination, limiting their participation in fast-paced activities.

Although many schools and therapy programs offer cognitive and behavioural support, structured physical fitness is frequently overlooked. The absence of accessible, adaptive exercise opportunities contributes to sedentary behaviours, lower confidence, higher risk of obesity, and reduced motor development.

GroovAbility aims to bridge this gap by providing an offline, sensory-friendly, gamified fitness solution that encourages children to move in a safe, predictable, and rewarding environment. Its approach aligns physical movement with behavioural science principles like positive reinforcement, gradual progression, visual scaffolding, and routine-building. Through this approach, the project aims to enhance not only physical health but also support emotional regulation, independence, and overall quality of life for neurodiverse children.

2.2 The Problem

Children with neurodevelopmental conditions such as Down syndrome, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Williams syndrome, and Noonan syndrome frequently experience challenges

related to motor coordination, muscle tone, balance, sensory processing, and sustained attention. For instance, individuals with Down syndrome often show low muscle tone and hyperflexibility, which make structured physical activity difficult without adapted guidance. These limitations affect not only their physical development but also their emotional well-being, social participation, and confidence.

Despite the essential role of physical exercise in improving strength, balance, endurance, emotional regulation, and cognitive functioning, there is a noticeable lack of inclusive, child-friendly fitness options tailored specifically for neurodiverse children. Most existing fitness apps are built for neurotypical users: they rely heavily on constant internet access, include distracting graphics, demand complex navigation, track personal data, or have high cognitive load. These design choices can overwhelm neurodiverse users or make routine engagement nearly impossible.

Current fitness solutions often fall into two extremes:

- Oversimplified programs that do not account for syndrome-specific motor needs, fatigue patterns, sensory sensitivities, or skill levels
- Overly advanced programs unsuitable for children with delayed coordination, low endurance, or difficulty following fast-paced instructions

As a result, many children lose interest quickly, feel confused or overstimulated, or are unable to exercise independently. Additionally, environments like gyms, dance studios, or busy classrooms can add sensory overload - bright lights, loud music, unfamiliar equipment - which further reduces participation.

A major gap exists: there is no accessible, research-based, entirely offline fitness platform that adapts to different syndromes, protects user privacy, provides sensory comfort, and supports independent engagement. This unmet need led to the creation of GroovAbility, an inclusive fitness project that merges behavioural science, child development, and digital accessibility to help neurodiverse children experience movement in a safe, engaging, meaningful way.

2.3 GroovAbility as a Solution

GroovAbility is an interactive, child-friendly fitness application designed specifically for neurodiverse children. The app transforms physical movement into an adaptive, game-based experience that aligns with each child's sensory preferences, communication style, physical abilities, and behavioural needs. Its goal is not only to promote exercise but also to build confidence, routine, and emotional regulation.

The platform includes features such as customizable profiles, visual and auditory simplification, and gamified exercise sessions that reward consistency with badges, points, and achievements. The exercises span strength, balance, coordination, rhythm-based movement, and prop-assisted workouts. Each module is informed by research on motor patterns and sensory sensitivities associated with different syndromes, making the routines developmentally appropriate and safe.

Designed with low-stimulus visuals, soft colour palettes, clear animations, and minimal cognitive load, GroovAbility integrates physical activity with play and therapeutic principles. By enabling children to participate independently, without internet connectivity or data collection, the app supports physical development while prioritizing emotional comfort and digital safety. For parents, educators, and therapists, GroovAbility offers a structured and accessible tool to bring inclusive fitness into daily routines.

2.4 Objectives

GroovAbility was developed to address these systemic gaps by integrating behavioural science, accessible design, and research-based exercise routines into one inclusive platform. The project focuses on the following key objectives:

- **Promote Holistic Physical Development**

Provide structured yet flexible routines that improve balance, coordination, strength, and flexibility among neurodiverse children.

- **Ensure a Safe, Private User Environment**

Create a completely offline mobile app that stores all data locally, ensuring user privacy and preventing exposure to external servers or tracking.

- **Conduct Responsible and Anonymous Research**

Gather insights on the motor and sensory needs of neurodiverse children ethically, without collecting any personal or identifiable data.

- **Increase Engagement Through Gamification**

Use badges, points, and rewards to reinforce consistency and make exercise enjoyable and intrinsically motivating.

- **Ensure Accessibility and Sensory Comfort**

Design a calming interface with simple visuals, clear animations, and adjustable sound settings to support children with sensory sensitivities.

- **Offer Variety and Adaptability**

Include a wide range of routines - dance, balance, strength, and prop-based movements, with adjustable difficulty levels tailored to different syndromes.

- **Empower Parents, Educators, and Therapists**

Provide guided exercise modules and progress tracking tools that support caregivers in fostering consistent physical activity.

- **Foster Social and Emotional Growth**

Use interactive routines and positive reinforcement strategies to build confidence, self-expression, and emotional regulation.

- **Leverage Technology for Inclusivity**

Develop a portable mobile tool that can be used at home, in school, or during therapy sessions, even without professional supervision.

2.5 Inspiration

My inspiration for GroovAbility began during my work as a volunteer at Urja Special Centre, an NGO and school for neurodiverse children. I spent time assisting teachers, designing small tech solutions, and closely observing how the children engaged with their learning environment. While Urja provided excellent cognitive and skill-building activities - focused on attention, memory, communication, and problem-solving - I noticed that structured physical fitness was significantly limited.

Many children struggled with low muscle tone, delayed motor coordination, sensory sensitivities, and reduced endurance, making them hesitant to participate in movement-based activities. Even simple exercises became difficult without tailored support. Caregivers and teachers repeatedly shared how challenging it was to find exercises that were safe, motivating, and suitable for different developmental conditions. This imbalance - strong cognitive support but limited physical engagement - stood out to me as a meaningful gap.

As someone passionate about health and fitness, I understood how closely movement is linked with emotional stability, concentration, and overall well-being. Scientific research also highlights that physical exercise can improve sensory integration, reduce stress, enhance mood, and build independence in neurodiverse children. I felt compelled to create a solution that merged therapy,

play, and movement in a way that felt joyful instead of overwhelming. This realization became the foundation of GroovAbility.

3. Background

3.1 Ongoing Challenges in Neurodiverse Fitness

Although awareness about neurodevelopmental conditions has improved, physical fitness remains one of the most overlooked areas in the support of neurodiverse children. Research and field observations consistently showed that motor skill development, sensory processing differences, and behavioural needs impact how children engage with exercise. These challenges form a multi-layered barrier that prevents regular participation in physical activity.

- **Lack of Awareness and Structured Fitness Programs**

Most schools, therapy centres, and special-needs programs prioritise cognitive and behavioural training, while physical fitness is often treated as optional. Many educators and caregivers lack structured routines that suit diverse developmental profiles. Without consistent, syndrome-specific guidance, children miss out on opportunities to build strength, coordination, and endurance - skills that directly affect daily functioning.

- **Low Motor Coordination and Muscle Tone**

Conditions such as Down syndrome, Williams syndrome, and Noonan syndrome are frequently associated with hypotonia, joint laxity, and balance difficulties. Similarly, children with Autism Spectrum Disorder may show delays in gross and fine motor skills due to sensory processing differences or reduced body awareness. Traditional fitness routines often require precision, repetition, or fast-paced instruction, making them unsuitable and sometimes discouraging for these children.

- **Sensory Sensitivities and Overstimulation**

Neurodiverse children often experience sensory processing challenges. Loud music, complex visuals, crowded rooms, or unpredictable movement can lead to sensory overload. Standard gym or dance environments may therefore feel stressful rather than motivating. The lack of sensory-friendly exercise spaces makes physical activity uncomfortable, which reduces willingness to participate independently.

- **Limited Access to Inclusive and Adaptive Tools**

Mainstream fitness apps and exercise resources are designed for neurotypical users, with bright graphics, fast transitions, and high cognitive load. These interfaces rarely consider communication styles, simplified instructions, visual scaffolding, or sensory comfort. They also lack personalised routines that reflect syndrome-specific motor development patterns. As a result, digital fitness tools fail to meet the needs of the children who may benefit from them the most.

- **Lack of Motivation and Engagement**

Neurodiverse children often respond better to visual reinforcement, predictable routines, and gamified progression rather than competition or abstract fitness goals. Traditional fitness models rarely incorporate these motivational strategies. Without enjoyable routines, positive reinforcement, or visual rewards, children quickly lose interest, leading to inconsistent engagement with physical activity.

- **Limited Parental and Institutional Guidance**

Caregivers, teachers, and therapists often struggle to find practical tools that help integrate structured physical activity into daily learning. Most available materials focus on academic or behavioural development rather than movement-based growth. This gap prevents fitness from becoming a stable part of the child's routine, despite its proven benefits for emotional regulation, concentration, and motor development.

3.2 Fitness Research: Evidence-Based Analysis for Neurodiverse Children

The development of GroovAbility was guided by a thorough review of research on physical activity programs for neurodiverse children, including those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Down syndrome. The aim was to identify strategies backed by evidence to enhance engagement, motor development, and overall wellness in children with diverse cognitive and sensory abilities. This section summarizes key findings from the literature and offers practical insights for designing the app.

Physical Activity and Motor Function

Research consistently shows that structured physical exercise improves motor skills, balance, and coordination in neurodiverse children. For instance, studies involving children with Down syndrome reveal that targeted exercises, such as balance training, aerobic activities, and strength

exercises, lead to noticeable improvements in postural stability and gross motor function. Similarly, children with ASD show better motor coordination and flexibility through regular participation in organized physical activity programs.

Implications for GroovAbility: Exercises in the app, including guided stretches, simple aerobic routines, and movement-based games with animated GIF demonstrations, aim to progressively enhance motor skills while being fun and accessible for children with sensory sensitivities.

Cognitive and Social Benefits

Several studies suggest that physical activity benefits not only physical fitness but also supports cognitive development and social interaction. Exercise programs are linked to improvements in attention span, memory, and executive functioning in children with ASD. Furthermore, engaging in physical activities in group settings or guided interactions fosters social communication, turn-taking, and cooperation.

Implications for GroovAbility: Features like achievement tracking, progress badges, and collaborative challenges were added to encourage cognitive engagement and social motivation, using the positive feedback and encouragement of peers.

Engagement and Motivation through Fun and Visual Guidance

Research stresses the need for engagement and visual cues for neurodiverse children, especially those with attention issues or learning differences. Children are more likely to stick with exercises when the activities are visually appealing, interactive, and structured with clear, immediate rewards. Studies focused on ASD populations show that animated, predictable, and repetitive visual demonstrations greatly enhance exercise participation.

Implications for GroovAbility: The app uses cartoon animal GIFs, showcasing simple, repetitive movements to meet this need, allowing children to imitate exercises on their own while enjoying the experience. Feedback from children during sessions at Sunrise Special Learning School, Noida, and URJA, Faridabad, confirmed that the animations were very engaging and encouraged them to achieve fitness goals.

Health, Well-Being, and Long-Term Fitness Outcomes

Research consistently indicates that regular physical activity enhances cardiovascular health, muscle strength, flexibility, and overall quality of life in neurodiverse children. Children with Down syndrome especially benefit from exercises that improve aerobic fitness and muscle tone,

lowering the risks of obesity and related health issues. Likewise, children with ASD experience reduced anxiety, hyperactivity, and stress when involved in organized physical activity programs.

Implications for GroovAbility: The app features short, flexible routines that focus on cardiovascular endurance, strength, and flexibility, with progression options to keep users engaged over the long term. By encouraging consistent exercise, the app aims to promote both physical health and emotional well-being.

These research insights shaped GroovAbility's exercise selection, visual design, and gamification strategy, making sure the app is both fun and engaging while also based on solid fitness strategies for neurodiverse children.

Summary of Key Research Papers on Physical Activity for Neurodiverse Children

Study / Source	Population	Intervention	Key Findings	Implications for App Design
Frontiers in Psychology, 2024	Children with ASD	Exercise programs (meta-analysis)	Exercise improved social skills and engagement	Include social-motivation features and gamified challenges
PMC, 2025	Children with ASD	Structured exercises for flexibility and cognitive control	Positive impact on motor skills and executive functioning	Integrate routines for flexibility and coordination
ScienceDirect, 2012	Children with ASD	Behavioral exercise interventions	Improved motor and social functioning	Use animated demonstrations for guided movement
BMC Psychology, 2024	Children with ASD	Physical activity interventions	Enhanced sociability and communication	Visual feedback and achievement rewards to reinforce participation
PLOS ONE, 2024	Children with Down syndrome	Regular physical activity programs	Improved quality of life, motor function	Focus on aerobic and balance exercises

PMC, 2025	Children with Down syndrome	Balance and strength training	Measurable improvements in postural stability	Include progressive strength and balance exercises
Springer, 2025	Children with Down syndrome	Sports and fitness activities	Better cardiovascular health, muscle tone	Short, adaptable sessions targeting fitness
Physical Therapy Journal, 2021	Children with developmental disabilities	Participation-focused interventions	Increased adherence to physical activity	Use fun, visually-guided, and gamified exercises

3.3 Related Work

A review of existing digital and community-based fitness resources highlights significant progress but also major gaps in accessibility, adaptability, and sensory considerations.

- **Down Syndrome Good Health App (Down Syndrome Australia)**

A health-tracking app that promotes daily habits through simple interfaces and mini-games.

Strengths: Encourages routine and self-monitoring.

Limitations: Not designed for children; limited in motor-skill-focused exercises or gamified physical movement.

- **Down 2B Fit**

Provides inclusive workout videos for individuals with developmental disabilities.

Strengths: Community-led demonstrations; varied routines.

Limitations: Video-based, non-interactive, no adaptive difficulty or personalised profiling.

- **GiGiFIT (GiGi's Playhouse)**

Professionally designed fitness programs for Down syndrome across age groups.

Strengths: Strong therapeutic foundation.

Limitations: Not personalised in real-time; limited gamification; dependent on videos or in-person programs.

- **ExerciseBuddy (ASD Fitness App)**

Uses visual support and video modelling to help children with ASD improve gross motor skills.

Strengths: Evidence-based improvements in physical outcomes.

Limitations: Limited to ASD; focused on locomotor skills rather than holistic routines.

- **Reset Moves (Australia)**

A wellbeing app with short activities and motion recognition for neurodivergent children.

Strengths: Suitable for short attention spans; certified autism-friendly.

Limitations: Primarily game-based; less emphasis on strength, balance, or structured fitness.

- **AI-Adapted Exercise Instruction Project**

Used AI to simplify instructions from a large video exercise dataset to fit neurodivergent needs.

Strengths: Shows potential of personalised instruction.

Limitations: Not a full fitness app; lacks interactivity, rewards, or structured exercise sets.

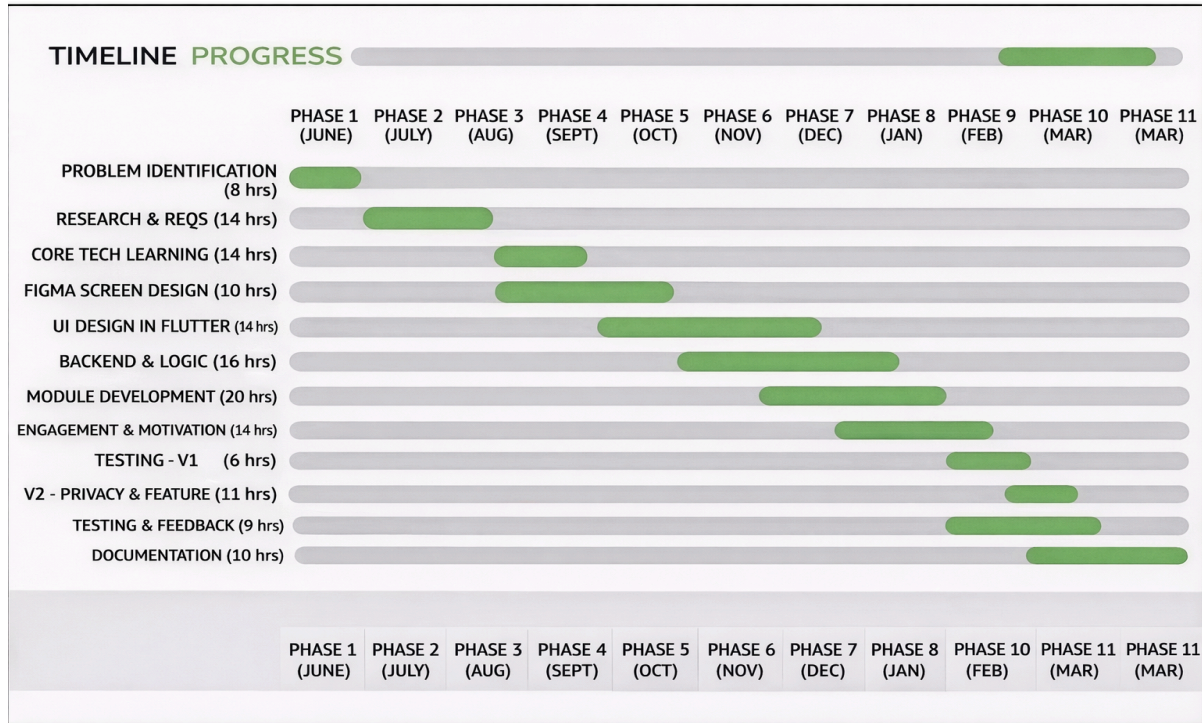
- **Lu Interactive Playground Exergame**

A large-scale interactive display system designed to make physical education engaging for neurodivergent students.

Strengths: Immersive and highly motivating.

Limitations: Requires expensive infrastructure; not portable or personalised.

4. Timeline and Plan



Total Hours: 146 hours

Phases	Breakdown of time commitment
Phase 1: Identifying the Problem & Initial Understanding (8 hours)	Understanding the need (4 hrs): Explored challenges faced by neurodiverse children (Down syndrome, Williams syndrome, Noonan syndrome, ASD) in accessing structured, sensory-friendly fitness routines. Problem framing (4 hrs): Defined the core issue: lack of accessible, adapted physical activity programs for neurodiverse children.

Phase 2: Research and Requirement Definition (14 hours)	Research on neurodiversity & fitness (8 hrs): Reviewed journals, clinical studies, therapy guidelines, and exercise recommendations. Exercise suitability mapping (4 hrs): Identified safe and enjoyable activities - balance drills, rhythm-based movement, coordination tasks, strength routines. Feature definition (2 hrs): Finalized app requirements: syndrome-specific routines, simple UI, offline mode, and progress tracking.
Phase 3: Learning Core Technologies (Flutter & Dart) (14 hours)	Programming foundations (8 hrs): Learned Dart language basics, widget structure, state management, and app architecture. Flutter UI/UX basics (6 hrs): Practiced building simple screens and layouts to understand responsive design.
Phase 4: Designing the App Screens in Figma (10 hours)	Screen layout design (6 hrs): Created the basic structure of each screen in Figma, showing where buttons, icons, and text will go. Visual design (4 hrs): Choose simple colors, large icons, clear fonts, and a clean layout suitable for neurodiverse children. Navigation flow (4 hrs): Planned how the child will move from one screen to another to ensure the app is easy to use.
Phase 5: UI Development in Flutter (14 hours)	Screen implementation (7 hrs): Translated Figma designs into functional app screens using Flutter and Dart, building layouts with buttons, icons, and text. Styling and components (5 hrs): Applied consistent colors, fonts, and reusable widgets to ensure a clean, accessible, and child-friendly interface. Navigation setup (2 hrs): Implemented smooth screen transitions and navigation flow within the app to match the planned user journey and maintain ease of use.

Phase 5: Backend Development and Logic Design (16 hours)	User profile & data storage (6 hrs) : Cloud storage integration (4 hours) - Implemented online data storage using Firebase, allowing user data such as profiles and step counts to be stored and synchronized through a real-time database. Syndrome-based logic (6 hrs): Added logic that selects exercise routines based on the child’s specific syndrome or ability level.
Phase 6: Exercise Module Development (20 hours)	Module creation (8 hrs): Built exercise screens for rhythm, balance, strength, and coordination. Animations & cues (6 hrs): Integrated simple visual cues and guiding animations. Routine sequencing (6 hrs): Organized exercises into structured sets aligned with different motor and sensory needs.
Phase 7: Engagement and Motivation Features (14 hours)	Progress tracking (4 hrs): Designed daily and weekly progress tracking features and stored all records. Reward systems (4 hrs): Designed badges, achievements, and positive reinforcement elements. Gamification logic (6 hrs): Created motivational loops to encourage consistency and enjoyment.
Phase 8: Testing - V1 (6 hours)	NGO testing and feedback (4 hours): Tested the first version with NGOs working with neurodiverse children to evaluate usability and engagement. Privacy concerns identified (2 hours): NGOs emphasized the importance of strong privacy protections when handling children’s data. Storing sensitive information on cloud servers raised concerns, leading to the decision to redesign the data system to prioritize local storage.

Phase 9: Version 2 - Privacy & Feature Improvements (11 hours)	Migration to local storage (6 hours): Replaced Firebase with Hive, a lightweight local database, to enable full offline functionality. This improved performance and ensured all user data remained securely stored on-device, addressing privacy concerns. Feature improvements (5 hours): Added profile editing, mascot customization, and improvements to the step-tracking system.
Phase 10: Testing and Feedback Integration (9 hours)	Pilot testing (6 hrs): Conducted final tests at NGOs and schools such as Urja Special Centre, collecting feedback on usability and engagement. Refinement (3 hrs): Made final improvements to the UI, exercise difficulty levels, transitions, and visual cues based on feedback.
Phase 11: Documentation (10 hours)	Documentation (10 hrs): Documented the entire process - research, development, testing, findings, and conclusions.

5. Innovation

GroovAbility introduces an evidence-informed, behaviour-science-based approach to physical fitness for neurodiverse children, addressing needs that mainstream fitness apps and therapy tools currently overlook. Its core innovation lies in combining syndrome-specific exercise guidance, sensory-friendly design, and gamified behavioural reinforcement within a fully offline, privacy-preserving mobile platform.

1. Syndrome-Adaptive Exercise Recommendation System

Unlike general fitness apps, GroovAbility adapts its exercise sets based on the child's neurodevelopmental condition - such as Down syndrome, ASD, Williams syndrome, or Noonan syndrome. Each routine is created from research on motor tone, balance challenges, fatigue

patterns, and sensory needs associated with these syndromes. This targeted adaptation offers a level of personalization rarely seen in child-focused fitness solutions.

2. Simplified Visual Modelling for Movement Guidance

The app uses animated, cartoon-style characters to demonstrate each movement in a simple, visually predictable way. This reduces cognitive load and supports children who struggle with imitation, sequencing, or fast-paced verbal instructions. These visual adaptations make GroovAbility more accessible than video-based or text-heavy programs.

3. Fully Offline, Data-Safe Architecture

All user profiles, preferences, and progress logs are stored locally within the app. No internet, cloud services, or external databases are used. This structure protects children's identities, prevents data tracking, and ensures safe use in schools or NGOs where privacy is essential - an innovation rarely prioritised in existing neurodiverse fitness tools.

4. Gamified Behavioural Reinforcement

GroovAbility applies behavioural science principles such as positive reinforcement, consistency rewards, and achievable progression levels. Badges, points, and milestones help sustain motivation, especially for children who benefit from structured routines and visual encouragement rather than competitive performance metrics.

5. Designed for Sensory and Cognitive Accessibility

The interface uses calming colour palettes, limited on-screen elements, slow transitions, and adjustable audio. This sensory-friendly environment allows neurodiverse children to exercise independently without feeling overstimulated.

6. Portable Support for Parents, Educators, and Therapists

GroovAbility fills a significant gap where trained fitness professionals are unavailable. It offers consistent, research-backed routines that caregivers and teachers can rely on in home or classroom settings, especially when class sizes are large or one-on-one instruction is not possible.

6. Selection of Approach

To determine the most suitable design for Groovability, I evaluated different approaches based on key criteria: accessibility for neurodiverse children, privacy of user data, offline usability, ease of interaction, scalability, and practicality for NGOs and schools with limited technical infrastructure.

Options considered and decisions

1. Platform choice: Mobile App vs Website

Why consider?

The project required a platform through which children could interact with fitness activities, track steps, and engage with gamified elements such as mascots and rewards.

Website:

Advantages: Accessible through any browser; easier to update centrally; no installation required.

Limitations: Limited offline capability; weaker integration with phone sensors (such as step counters); slower performance on mobile browsers; fewer options for interactive UI elements.

Mobile App:

Advantages: Better integration with device sensors like step counters; smoother and more interactive user interface; ability to support offline features and local data storage; faster performance and more engaging user experience for children. Apps are also easier for NGOs and students to access repeatedly without needing a browser each time.

Decision:

A mobile app was selected as the primary platform because it provides better offline functionality, stronger integration with phone hardware, and a more engaging and accessible interface for young users.

2. Online Data Storage – Firebase (Initial System)

Why consider?

At the early development stage, I used Firebase to store user data such as profiles, step counts, and progress metrics.

Advantages:

Real-time database syncing; simple backend setup; reliable cloud storage; easy integration with mobile applications.

Limitations:

Requires continuous internet access; user data is stored on external servers; higher privacy concerns when working with children's data; dependence on connectivity can limit usability in environments where internet access is inconsistent.

Decision:

Initially implemented in Version 1, but not selected for the final architecture after testing with NGOs highlighted the importance of stronger privacy protections and offline capability.

3. Offline Data Storage – Hive (Final System)**Why consider?**

To ensure stronger privacy and allow the app to function without internet access, I explored local database options for storing user data directly on the device.

Advantages:

Using Hive, a lightweight key–value database designed for Flutter applications, allowed the app to store all data locally on the device. Hive uses a binary storage format that enables fast read and write operations while maintaining a small memory footprint. Because data is stored directly on the phone, the app can operate fully offline, which improves reliability in schools or NGO environments where internet access may be limited. This approach also ensures sensitive information such as activity data and user profiles remains on-device, significantly improving privacy and security.

Limitations:

Data is stored locally on a single device unless exported manually or synced later.

Decision:

Hive-based offline local storage was selected as the final system because it best satisfies privacy, performance, and offline usability requirements.

4. Exercise Demonstration Method – Mascots/Animals vs Real People**Why consider?**

The app needed a clear and engaging way to demonstrate exercises and movement activities for children.

Real people demonstrating exercises:

Advantages: Realistic demonstration of movements.

Limitations: Less visually engaging for children; can sometimes feel instructional or formal; may not appeal equally to all users.

Mascots and animal-based demonstrations:

Advantages: More visually engaging and playful; easier for children to relate to characters; supports gamification elements within the app. This approach is particularly beneficial for neurodiverse children, as animated or character-based guidance can feel less intimidating and more approachable than watching real people perform exercises.

Decision:

Exercise demonstrations are done using animated mascots and animal characters. This approach improves engagement, supports the gamified design of the app, and creates a more comfortable learning environment for neurodiverse users.

7. Challenges Faced

During the development of GroovAbility, I encountered several scientific, technical, and practical challenges that significantly shaped the project. The first major difficulty was the lack of research and syndrome-specific guidelines for physical fitness in neurodiverse children. Unlike cognitive or behavioural interventions, structured exercise programs for children with Down syndrome, ASD, Williams syndrome, and Noonan syndrome are not well documented. To address this gap, I conducted an extensive review of available physiotherapy recommendations, clinical studies, and movement-based interventions to extract safe and reliable insights for designing each exercise module.

A second challenge was the absence of publicly available datasets containing child-friendly, adaptive exercise routines. Since no such datasets existed, I had to manually curate one. This involved identifying suitable movements, verifying their safety across different syndromes, and organising them into progressive, structured sequences. Creating this dataset from scratch required considerable time, caution, and repeated validation.

Developing the app introduced multiple technical challenges. Translating human movement into a mobile-friendly system required mastering new concepts in Flutter and Dart, including animation control, offline storage, and performance tracking. I built the entire app to function without internet connectivity, which meant designing a fully local database and logic system for user profiles, achievements, and progress tracking.

Another difficulty was producing clear and accessible exercise demonstrations. I created custom cartoon-animal GIF animations to model each movement in a simple, sensory-friendly way. Ensuring smooth looping, consistent pacing, and accurate posture depiction required several iterations and testing across different screen sizes.

Designing the engagement system, including badges and achievements, posed both behavioural and technical challenges. I needed to align the reward framework with principles of positive reinforcement while ensuring that the logic adapted to each user's progress. This required building a structured dataset of reward triggers and incorporating it into the offline system.

8. Methodology

The development of GroovAbility followed a structured, user-centred and iterative methodology that combined literature review, expert consultation, dataset creation, interface design, and repeated testing. The aim was to create a research-informed, accessible fitness app tailored to the physical and sensory needs of neurodiverse children.

8.1 Research and Preliminary Study

The project began with an extensive literature review to understand the motor, sensory, and behavioural needs of neurodiverse children, especially those diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Down syndrome, Williams syndrome and Noonan syndrome. I referred to physiotherapy guides, occupational therapy recommendations, research papers, and child-development resources to identify exercises that could safely improve balance, coordination, muscle tone and sensory regulation.

To ensure that the app reflected real-world needs, I consulted special educators and therapists at URJA Special School and Sunrise Learning School. Through discussions and observations, I learned which activities children enjoyed, which instructions they found confusing, and what typically discouraged them during exercise. Educators emphasised the importance of slow, rhythmic movements, simple visual guidance and gamified reinforcement. Their practical insights helped shape both the content and pacing of the app.

8.2 Dataset Creation and Curation

Since no publicly available dataset existed for neurodiverse fitness routines, I created a custom dataset from scratch. I identified child-friendly exercises commonly recommended by physiotherapists and occupational therapists, and organised them by:

- difficulty level (easy, medium, hard)
- purpose (strength, balance, coordination, rhythm)
- type (warm up, different body types, with props, dance)

Educators from URJA and Sunrise reviewed the draft dataset and helped refine it by removing exercises that were too complex, too fast, or required special equipment. This ensured that the routines were accessible and safe for children with varying abilities.

Each dataset entry included the exercise name, target area, recommended duration, difficulty level, movement description, and a linked GIF demonstrating the motion. To make the routines visually engaging and easy to imitate, I designed cartoon animal animations (bears, bunnies and dogs) using Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop. The animations were intentionally repetitive and slow-paced so neurodiverse children could follow them without feeling rushed. Several rounds of refinement were required to make the loops smooth and visually calm.

8.3 Application Design and Technical Framework

The GroovAbility mobile app was developed using Flutter and Dart, chosen for their cross-platform compatibility and ability to create simple, consistent layouts across devices. The interface prioritised accessibility: large buttons, minimal text, soft colours, and predictable navigation helped reduce cognitive load and support independent use.

Key components included:

- **Exercise Library**

A visual library organised by category, where each exercise was displayed with a GIF and simple instructions. The library included a wide range of routines such as warm-ups, body-part focused exercises (arms, legs, core, hands), rhythm-based dance and music movements, and functional activities that used everyday props like pillows, stuffed toys, balls, and light dumbbells. These options ensured variety while keeping movements simple, relatable, and safe for neurodiverse children. This structure allowed children to explore routines independently or with minimal guidance.

- **Progress Tracking System**

A straightforward tracker that logged completed sessions, streaks, and improvements over time. All progress data was stored locally to protect user privacy and allow the app to function fully offline.

- **Achievements and Rewards**

To support sustained engagement, I designed a reward system using virtual badges, stars, and immediate positive reinforcement. Educators shared that neurodiverse children respond strongly to visual rewards, which helped shape this module.

- **Personalization Features**

Users could select their syndrome type, allowing the app to filter exercises accordingly and provide appropriate recommendations. Simple avatar customization added a sense of ownership and fun to the experience.

8.4 Tools, Software, and Materials Used

The tools used in GroovAbility were carefully selected to keep the app lightweight, visually clear, and accessible:

- **Mobile App Development**

I used Flutter and Dart to build the app because they allowed me to maintain consistent layouts and accessible UI components across both Android and iOS devices. Flutter's widget-based design made it easier to create large buttons, clean screens and predictable navigation patterns ideal for neurodiverse users.

- **Offline Storage**

To ensure full privacy and offline usability, I used the Hive database. Hive allowed the app to store user progress, exercise history and achievement data directly on the device, without sending information to any server.

- **Design & Animation**

Cartoon-style exercise demonstrations were created using Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop. These tools helped me design expressive characters and smooth looping GIFs that children could follow easily.

For early interface mockups and feedback cycles, I used Figma to prototype navigation flow, screen designs and layout arrangements.

8.5 Iterative Refinement and Evaluation

GroovAbility was developed through an iterative cycle of prototyping, testing, and refinement. Early versions focused on core functions such as exercise playback, navigation, and progress tracking. These prototypes were tested informally with educators and students at URJA and Sunrise Special Learning School.

During these sessions, I observed how children interacted with the animations, buttons, and routines. Educators provided feedback on pacing, clarity of visuals, and moments where children became confused or overstimulated. Based on this input, I refined the app by slowing GIF loops, simplifying instructions, reorganizing exercise categories, and improving navigation cues.

The reward system also evolved after testing showed that neurodiverse children responded strongly to immediate visual reinforcement. I added simple badges, stars, and encouraging symbols to maintain motivation.

Technical evaluation focused on ensuring smooth performance on low-end devices, optimizing memory usage, and improving responsiveness in the offline environment. Each iteration made the app more intuitive, stable, and enjoyable.

By the final version, GroovAbility incorporated research insights, educator feedback, and user observations, resulting in a polished, child-friendly fitness tool that better matched the needs of neurodiverse learners.

9. App Flow, Screens and Implemented Features

9.1 Register Screen (First-Time Setup)

The Register Screen appears only the first time the app is launched. This screen introduces the user to Groovability in a friendly and engaging way. A playful lion mascot guides the user through the setup process by asking simple questions.

The user is asked to enter:

- Nickname
- Avatar selection
- Other basic user preferences

The avatar can be chosen from a collection of animated animal characters, making the experience interactive and child-friendly. These avatars help personalize the app and increase engagement among younger users.

The information entered during registration is stored locally and offline using the Hive database. The locally stored data includes:

- Nickname

- Selected avatar
- User preferences
- Other relevant profile information

Groovability follows an offline-first architecture, meaning that the application does not require an internet connection for its core functionality. Hive provides fast local data storage, allowing profile information, exercise progress, points, levels, step counts, and challenge progress to be accessed and updated directly on the device.

This approach provides several advantages. Users can access their profiles and exercise information without an internet connection, while their personal information remains stored locally instead of being transmitted to external servers. It also allows the application to function reliably in environments where internet connectivity may be limited or unstable.

This setup step is completed only once, after which the created profile is reused every time the app is opened.

9.2 Personal Needs Selection Screen

After registration, the app displays a screen designed to understand the user's physical and developmental needs. The screen asks:

"Which option best describes you?"

Users can select from several conditions commonly associated with neurodiversity:

- Down Syndrome
- Williams Syndrome
- Noonan Syndrome
- Autism Spectrum
- Other

This selection is used to guide the user toward exercises that are more appropriate for their physical and motor-developmental requirements.

The exercise design takes into account characteristics and challenges that may occur across these conditions, including:

- Balance and coordination difficulties
- Muscle tone variations
- Flexibility and motor-skill development
- Posture and stability challenges

By collecting this information during the initial setup process, Groovability can provide a more personalized exercise experience rather than presenting the same set of activities to every user.

The aim of this personalization is to promote safer and more effective physical activity while supporting the specific motor and physical development requirements of different users.

This customization step occurs only once during setup and forms the basis for the user's personalized experience within the application.

9.3 Home Screen

The Home Screen acts as the central dashboard of Groovability, providing an overview of the user's daily activity, fitness progress, achievements, and quick access to the application's main exercise features.

The screen includes the following elements:

Daily Goal Panel

The Daily Goal Panel displays the user's daily physical activity target and progress toward completing it. This provides users with a clear short-term objective and encourages them to remain physically active throughout the day.

Step Tracker

The Step Tracker displays the number of steps taken by the user throughout the day. Physical activity outside structured exercise sessions can therefore also contribute toward the user's overall progress.

Step-related progress contributes to the application's motivational system, allowing users to connect everyday movement with their achievements within the app.

Points and Level Tracker

Users earn points by completing exercises, challenges, and other activities within the application. These points accumulate toward level progression.

The Home Screen displays:

- Points earned
- Current level
- Progress toward the next level

The level progression system gives users a visible sense of achievement as they consistently participate in physical activity.

Exercise Overview

The Home Screen provides quick access to different exercise categories, including:

- Warm-up exercises
- Body-part focused workouts
- Balance and posture exercises
- Dance and rhythm-based activities
- Prop-based exercises

These categories form the core of Groovability's diverse exercise dashboard. The exercises are designed to support areas such as motor coordination, balance, posture, strength, stability, flexibility, and functional movement.

The Home Screen therefore combines exercise access, physical-activity tracking, and gamification in a single dashboard. This allows users to immediately see their progress while also providing a simple way to begin an activity.

9.4 Challenges and Tasks Page

The Challenges and Tasks Page introduces a gamified system of weekly goals designed to encourage consistent participation and make physical activity more engaging.

The screen displays:

- Weekly challenges
- Bonus challenges
- Weekly progress bar
- Points awarded for completed challenges

Each challenge has a specific objective and awards a designated number of points upon completion.

Example Challenge

Freestyle Hero: Try three different dance moves across separate sessions.

As the user completes activities related to a challenge, the progress bar updates automatically. Once the challenge is completed, the user receives the designated points, which contribute to their overall level progression.

Bonus challenges provide additional opportunities to earn points and accelerate progress.

The challenges system is designed to transform physical activity from a routine task into an interactive goal-based experience. By providing short-term objectives, visible progress, and rewards, the system encourages users to return to the application regularly and explore different types of activities.

The Challenges and Tasks Page therefore forms an important part of Groovability's gamification system by connecting exercise participation with points, progression, and achievement.

9.5 Exercises Page and Prop Exercises Page

The Exercises Page and Prop Exercises Page provide a structured overview of the physical activities available within Groovability.

Exercises Page

The Exercises Page organizes exercises into several categories:

- Warm-up exercises
- Body-part specific workouts
- Balance and posture exercises
- Dance and music-based activities

Body-part exercises can focus on areas including:

- Arms
- Core
- Legs
- Neck
- Back

These exercises are designed to support muscle development, coordination, stability, and functional mobility.

Warm-Up Exercises

Warm-up exercises prepare the body for physical activity by gradually activating muscles and joints. They provide an introductory stage before users move into more structured exercises.

Body-Part Exercises

Body-part exercises target specific areas of the body, allowing users to participate in activities focused on arms, core, legs, neck, and back. These movements support strength, coordination, and functional mobility.

Balance and Posture Exercises

Balance and posture training focuses on stability, body alignment, spatial awareness, and controlled movement. These exercises are particularly relevant for users who may experience challenges with balance or body control.

Dance and Music-Based Exercises

Groovability incorporates dance and rhythm-based activities, including Western line dance, beginner hip-hop movements, and other music-based activities.

Consultations with NGOs working with neurodiverse children indicated that music and movement-based activities can increase engagement and enjoyment. Dance therefore provides an alternative form of physical activity that combines exercise with music, rhythm, and creativity.

Prop Exercises Page

The Prop Exercises Page contains exercises that use simple household objects that are commonly available at home.

Examples include:

- Dumbbells or lightweight objects
- Pillows or cushions
- Resistance bands
- Chairs
- Balls of different sizes
- Kitchen helpers such as towels or water bottles

These exercises allow users to incorporate everyday objects into physical activities without requiring specialized equipment.

Prop-based activities can support:

- Hand-eye coordination
- Grip strength
- Balance
- Functional movement
- Strength development

- Motor coordination

The selected props are intended to be accessible and suitable for use within a home environment.

All exercises across these pages are designed around physical areas relevant to neurodiverse users, including motor coordination, balance, posture, muscle development, flexibility, and stability.

9.6 Exercise Screen

When a user selects an exercise, the application opens the dedicated Exercise Screen. This screen combines visual demonstrations, written instructions, exercise tracking, and rewards to make each activity easier to understand and more engaging.

Animated Demonstration

A friendly animated animal character performs the selected exercise.

The user is encouraged to observe and mimic the movement demonstrated by the character. The use of animated animal characters provides a visual method of instruction and makes the activity more approachable for younger users.

Exercise Instructions

Simple written instructions explain how the movement should be performed.

The combination of written instructions and animated demonstrations allows the user to receive information through both text and visual representation.

Sets and Repetitions

Each session includes three exercises at a time, with two sets for each exercise.

The number of repetitions per set depends on the individual exercise, allowing the intensity and structure of the session to vary according to the movement being performed.

Exercise Progress Bar

A progress indicator displays how much of the exercise session has been completed. This allows users to understand their progress during the activity and provides a visible sense of completion.

Reward Points

The Exercise Screen displays the number of points that will be awarded upon completing the activity.

Once the exercise is completed, the user receives the displayed points. These points contribute toward level progression and can also support progress within challenges.

The combination of animated demonstrations, instructions, progress tracking, and rewards is designed to make physical activity easier to understand while reinforcing motivation through gamification.

9.7 Profile Screen

The Profile Screen provides an overview of the user's personal information, fitness progress, and achievements.

Displayed information includes:

- Nickname
- Selected avatar
- Neurodiverse condition selected during setup
- Current fitness level

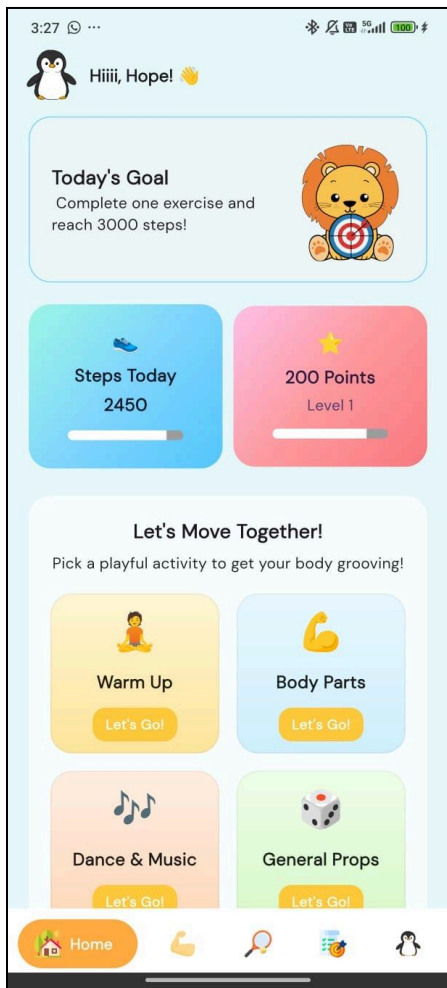
The screen also displays activity statistics such as:

- Steps taken during the day
- Total points earned
- Current level
- Level progress bar
- Points remaining to reach the next level

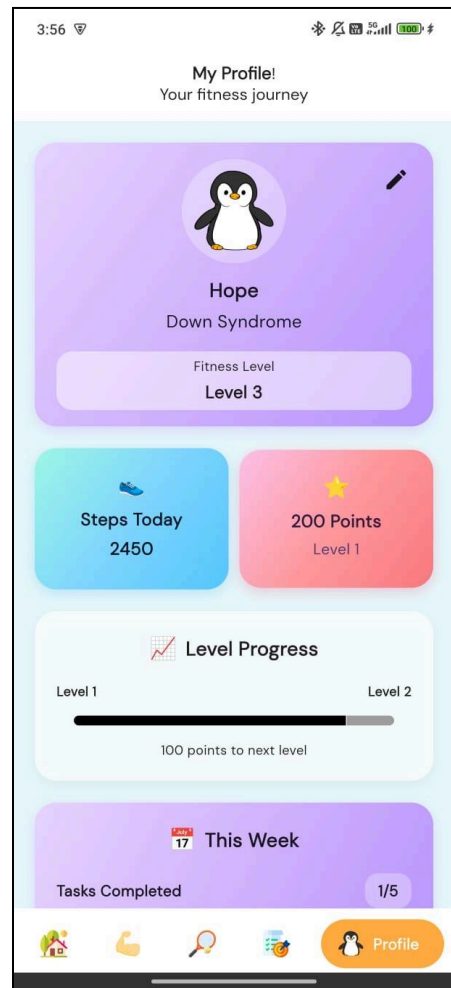
Additionally, a weekly task progress bar shows how much of the user's weekly challenge goals have been completed.

The Profile Screen therefore brings together the user's personal information and accumulated progress in one location. It allows users to monitor their achievements over time and see how their participation in exercises, challenges, and daily movement contributes to their overall progression.

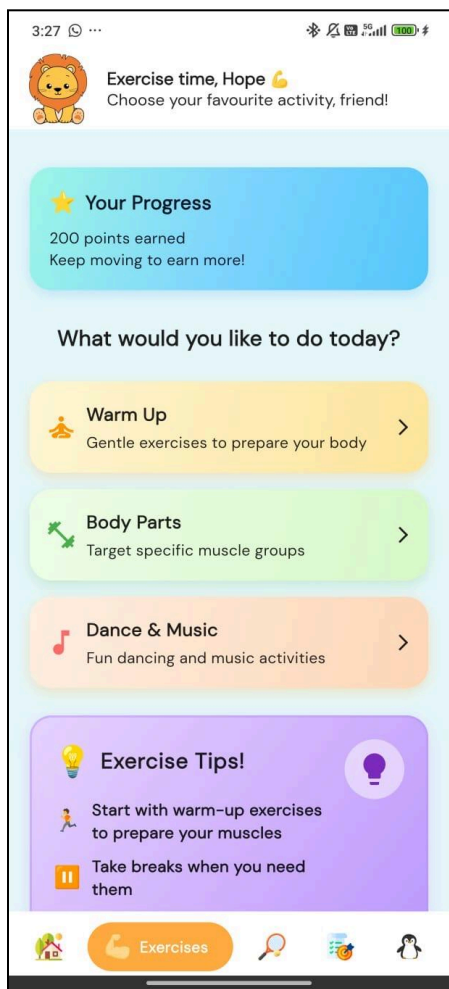
9.8 App UI Pictures



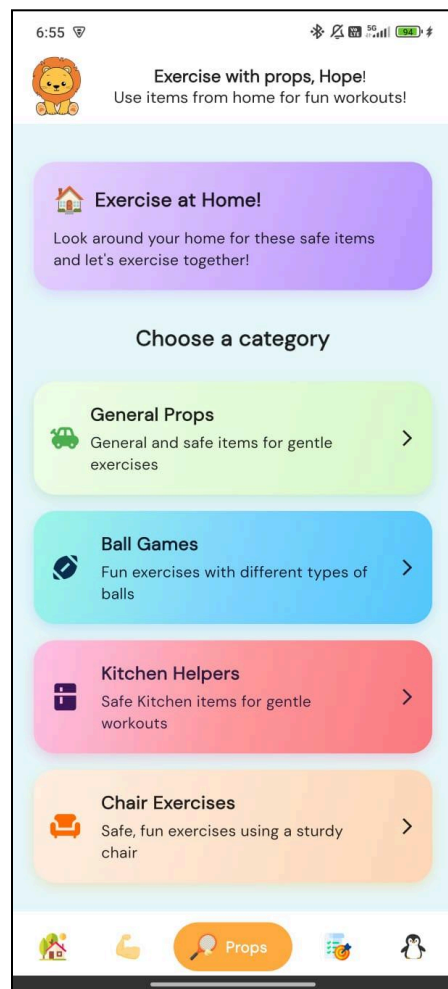
Home Screen



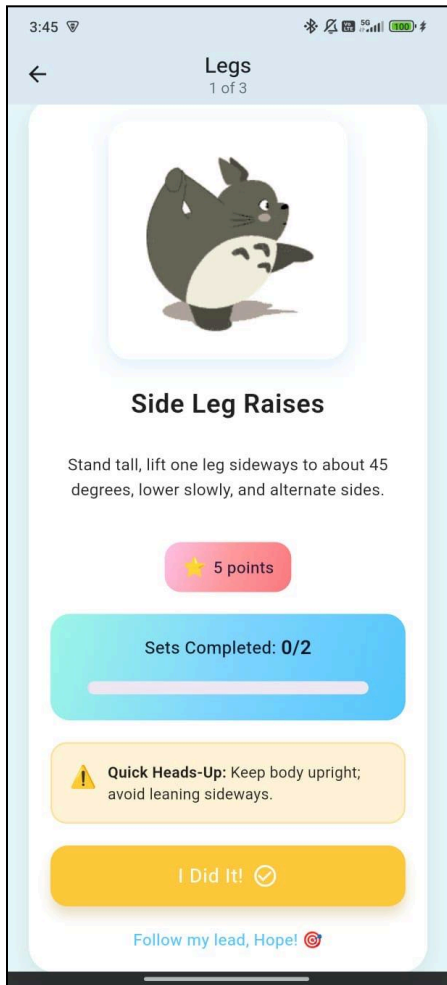
Profile Screen



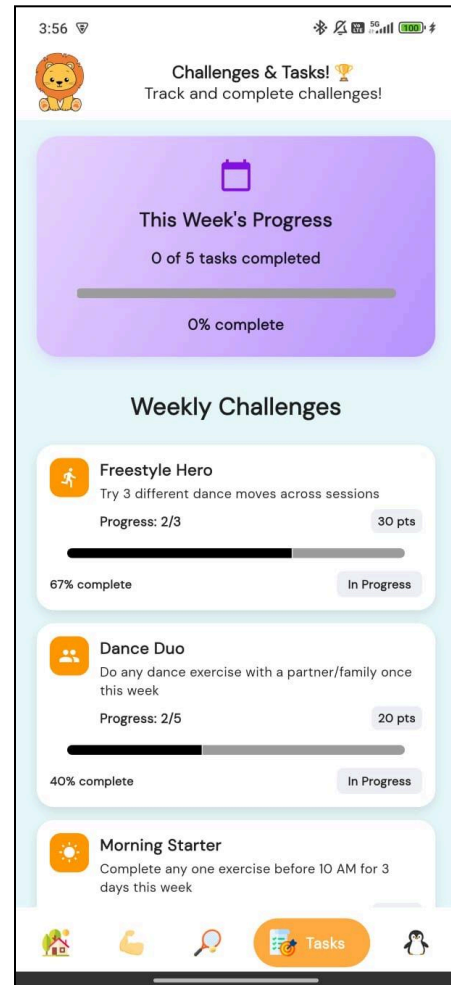
Exercises Screen



Exercises with Props Screen



Exercise Details Screen



Challenges & Tasks Screen 1

Groovability App Demonstration Video :

<https://youtube.com/shorts/2MSRkR46ub8?si=q6jTJ8KuHrf5s33J>

10. Local Data Storage

The app uses Hive, a lightweight key–value database for Flutter, to provide persistent, on-device storage without any backend server. Hive is initialized once at startup (`Hive.initFlutter()`), a single box named "User" is opened, and this box is reused throughout the app to read and write user data.

What Hive stores

All long-term state for the user is kept in the "User" box:

- **Profile & onboarding**

Profile & onboarding

`nickname`, `avatar`, `syndrome` — captured once during setup so the app can return the child straight to a personalised home screen on every launch.

Steps and activity

`today_steps`, `step_date`, `step_baseline`, `step_goal` — updated by the `StepCounterService` as new step events arrive, and persisted so progress survives restarts and day changes.

Points and fitness level

`total_points` — fitness level isn't stored directly; it's calculated from `total_points` using simple thresholds, so the scoring logic stays easy to adjust.

Weekly and bonus challenges

`weekly_challenges`, `bonus_challenge`, `today's_challenge`, `week_start_date` — the active challenge set and each user's progress, refreshed automatically at the start of each week using `week_start_date`.

- **Why Hive is suitable here**

Hive was chosen because it is fast, simple, and works entirely offline, which matches the app's requirements for a child-friendly fitness experience that must function without network connectivity. All data stored is low-risk, non-sensitive profile and gamification information (no passwords or medical records). Using a single "User" box keeps the design straightforward: any screen that needs persistent state can call `Hive.box("User")` and access the same shared store, while higher-level logic (step counting, challenge rotation, level calculation) is implemented in Dart code on top of these primitive keys.

11. Resource Management

Expert Guidance in App Development:

To successfully design and build the Groovability app, I sought expert guidance in mobile application development. I received mentorship on how to develop cross-platform mobile applications using Dart and the Flutter framework. This guidance helped me understand the fundamentals of building responsive user interfaces, structuring application logic, and ensuring smooth performance across devices. I also learned how to implement efficient local data storage using Hive, which allows the app to store user progress, activity records, and engagement data even when the device is offline. Mentors also advised me on debugging techniques, UI/UX design principles for accessibility, and best practices for structuring scalable app architecture. Their expertise helped me overcome technical challenges during development and ensured that the final application was stable, efficient, and user-friendly.

Collaboration with Medical Professionals (Neurologist and Orthopedist):

To ensure that Groovability's activities were safe and beneficial for neurodiverse children, I collaborated with medical professionals including a neurologist and an orthopedist. These experts helped me understand how neurological conditions can influence motor coordination, balance, muscle tone, and sensory processing. They explained common movement challenges

experienced by children with neurodevelopmental conditions and suggested ways to structure exercises that encourage gradual improvement in coordination and strength without causing strain. The orthopedist provided guidance on safe movement patterns and posture during physical activities, while the neurologist offered insights into how structured physical exercise can support motor development and cognitive engagement. Their recommendations helped shape the app's exercise routines so that they promote physical activity while remaining safe, accessible, and adaptable to different ability levels.

Collaboration with NGOs and Organizations Working with Neurodiverse Children:

To ensure that Groovability addressed real community needs, I interacted with several NGOs and organizations that work with neurodiverse children. These discussions provided insights into the challenges faced by educators, therapists, and caregivers in encouraging regular physical activity. Many organizations highlighted issues such as limited access to specialized fitness programs and difficulty keeping children engaged in traditional exercise routines. Based on this feedback, I refined Groovability to focus on interactive, structured fitness activities that could be easily used in schools, therapy centres, and home environments.

User Testing with Neurodiverse Children:

To evaluate the usability and effectiveness of the app, I conducted testing sessions with neurodiverse children, including those with Down syndrome, Williams syndrome, Noonan syndrome, and Autism spectrum disorder. Observing how children interacted with the exercises and navigation provided useful feedback on engagement levels and ease of use. This testing helped improve the clarity of instructions, adjust the pacing of activities, and simplify parts of the interface so that children could interact with the app more comfortably.

Feedback from Caregivers, Educators, and Therapists:

In addition to testing with children, I gathered feedback from caregivers, educators, and therapists who regularly support neurodiverse individuals. Their experience helped refine the structure of the activities and emphasized the importance of clear visual instructions, short exercise sessions, and positive reinforcement. Their input ensured that the app could be easily integrated into therapy sessions, school programs, and home routines.

12. Validation and Testing

Participants: 42 neurodiverse children

- ASD: 18
- Down Syndrome: 11
- Williams Syndrome: 5
- Noonan Syndrome: 3
- Other developmental conditions: 5

Age Range: 7–15 years

Testing Duration: 3-4 weeks (5-6 total NGO visits)

Educators/Therapists: 8

Caregivers: 14

Prior to the sessions, approval for the validation and testing sessions was taken from the management of the participating organisations including URJA Special Centre and Sunrise Special Learning School. The educators and staff were briefed on the purpose of the project, the testing procedure, and the intended use of the application. All children involved in the use of the application had received informed consent from their parents or legal guardians . The teachers and NGO staff supervised the testing sessions to make sure the children were safe and comfortable while doing the activities. Participation was entirely voluntary, and no personally identifying or sensitive information was collected. All observations and feedback are documented anonymously and used exclusively to improve the usability, accessibility and exercise design of the application.

Parameter	No. of children	Percentage
Enjoyed using GroovAbility	36/42	85.7%
Completed an exercise independently	30/42	71.4%

Found animal demonstrations helpful	33/42	78.6%
Wanted to use the app again	31/42	73.8%
Motivated by rewards and badges	29/42	69.0%
Found app easy to understand	34/42	81.0%
Found app easy to navigate	32/42	76.2%
Found instructions clear	33/42	78.6%
Felt comfortable using app	29/42	69%
Required assistance from caregivers	13/42	30.9%
Would recommend to friends/classmates	30/42	71.4%

Favourite feature in Groovability:

Feature	Children	Percentage
Dance & Rhythm Activities	13	31.0%
Animal Demonstrations	11	26.2%
Rewards & Badges	7	16.7%
Prop Exercises	5	11.9%
Weekly Challenges	4	9.5%
Step Tracking	2	4.8%

Exercise Preferences:

Exercise Type	Children	Percentage
---------------	----------	------------

Dance Exercises	14	33.3%
Balance Exercises	9	21.4%
Warm-Up Activities	7	16.7%
Prop-Based Activities	5	11.9%
Core Exercises	4	9.5%
Arm & Leg Exercises	3	7.1%

Educator Feedback:

Observation	Educators	Percentage
Visual demonstrations were useful	7/8	87.5%

Children remained engaged longer	6/8	75.0%
Interface was accessible	7/8	87.5%
Rewards improved participation	6/8	75.0%
Suitable for classroom use	6/8	75.0%
Exercise difficulty appropriate	5/8	62.5%

Observations of Behavioural & Fitness changes among children:

Observed Improvement	Children Showing Improvement	Percentage
Increased willingness to participate in physical activity	34	80.9%

Improved balance during exercises	22	52.4%
Improved coordination and movement control	24	57.1%
Greater exercise endurance (less fatigue)	18	42.9%
Improved rhythm and movement synchronization	26	61.9%
Increased confidence when attempting activities	25	59.5%
Improved ability to follow exercise sequences	21	50.0%
Improved hand-eye coordination during prop exercises	20	47.6%

Specific Observations:

Autism Spectrum Disorder:

Improved participation during dance and rhythm-based activities; better attention during structured exercise sessions

Down Syndrome (11 children):

Improved balance, posture, and confidence during movement activities

Williams Syndrome (5 children):

Strong engagement with music-based exercises and improved coordination

Noonan Syndrome (3 children):

Improved willingness to participate and gradual improvement in exercise endurance

Other Conditions (5 children):

Increased physical activity levels and improved engagement with visual demonstrations

The findings from these testing sessions were used to improve the application's interface, exercise sequencing, visual demonstrations, and reward mechanisms before finalizing the implementation.

13. Results

The GroovAbility project resulted in a fully functional mobile application designed to support the physical and emotional well-being of neurodiverse children. Through inclusive design principles, evidence-based movement routines, and a sensory-friendly interface, the app successfully addressed many barriers children face in traditional fitness environments.

Functionality, Design, and User Experience

GroovAbility ran smoothly on mobile devices and demonstrated stable performance across multiple screen sizes. The cartoon animal GIFs - bears, bunnies, and dogs - were particularly effective in providing clear visual modeling that children could easily imitate. The calm color palette, minimalistic layout, and low-stimulus interface reduced distractions and made independent navigation possible for many users.

Engagement, Motivation, and Positive Feedback

Gamified elements such as badges, stars, and streak tracking significantly improved engagement. During demonstrations and interactive sessions at Sunrise and URJA, children participated enthusiastically and often repeated movements out of enjoyment. Several students described the routines as “fun” or “like a game.” Educators observed improved willingness to exercise, sustained attention during activities, and boosted confidence, especially when visual rewards appeared.

Consultation, Review, and Iterative Improvements

Regular consultations with special educators and therapists guided the refinement of exercise difficulty, pacing, and visual clarity. The feedback collected during live sessions highlighted areas for enhancement - especially the need for slower animation loops, simpler navigation, and reduced cognitive load. Implementing these changes led to a noticeably smoother experience and higher engagement among children.

Data Management, Scalability, and Adaptability

Even though GroovAbility works completely offline using local storage (Hive), its modular architecture supports future expansion. New exercise categories, more difficulty levels, advanced tracking, and offline personalization can be added without altering the core structure. This makes the app adaptable for use in different schools, NGOs, and therapy programs.

Overcoming Research and Technological Challenges

The lack of existing neurodiverse fitness datasets required extensive manual curation of exercises. Creating GIF-based visual models also demanded multiple prototypes to ensure clarity and consistency. Technological challenges - such as ensuring performance on low-end devices and reducing sensory overload - were resolved through iterative testing and evaluation.

GroovAbility emerged as a promising prototype that blends behavioral science, inclusive design, and mobile technology to enhance physical activity in neurodiverse children. Feedback from students, caregivers, and educators confirmed its effectiveness in promoting regular exercise, improving engagement, and creating a positive, motivating fitness experience.

14. Discussion

The main goal of GroovAbility was to explore fitness routines that could support the physical and behavioral development of neurodiverse children. The project demonstrated that

well-chosen, research-backed exercises can improve balance, coordination, strength, and engagement. However, the variability in children's responses highlighted the importance of adaptive and individualized fitness interventions.

One challenge was the inconsistency in findings across existing research. Studies often reported different outcomes for similar exercises, making it difficult to create universal guidelines. Consulting educators and therapists at URJA and Sunrise helped refine routines, adjust intensity, and ensure that exercises felt safe, achievable, and enjoyable. Their insights grounded the project in real-world practice rather than theory alone.

Variability in student performance - shaped by mood, sensory distractions, fatigue, and attention span - also affected consistency. While this introduced limitations, it offered an authentic view of how neurodiverse children interact with exercise in natural settings. These fluctuations strengthened the argument for flexible, child-led exercise planning.

For future work, integrating more structured data collection - such as strength or balance measurements - would improve accuracy. Long-term tracking over weeks or months could offer deeper insights into sustained impact. Further research could also explore emotional or cognitive outcomes of exercise, such as mood regulation, improved focus, or increased confidence.

Overall, the project shows that inclusive, thoughtfully structured fitness tools can meaningfully support the well-being of neurodiverse children. The adaptive, user-centered approach used in GroovAbility resulted in practical insights that can guide future interventions and research.

15. Conclusion

After three weeks of testing GroovAbility with 42 neurodiverse children, we found something genuinely encouraging: the app made a real difference in how these kids moved, and more importantly, in how willing they were to keep trying.

Balance Improvement

- 8 of 11 children with Down syndrome demonstrated noticeable improvement in balance-related exercises.
- 4 of 5 children with Williams syndrome showed better stability during guided movement activities.
- Overall, 22 of 42 children (52.4%) demonstrated improved balance according to educator observations.

Coordination Improvement

- 24 of 42 children (57.1%) showed improvements in coordinated movement.

- Dance-based activities produced the highest engagement and coordination gains.
- Children who completed at least three dance sessions per week generally performed better in rhythm-based tasks.

Confidence and Participation

- 25 of 42 children (59.5%) became more confident when attempting new exercises.
- 31 of 42 children (73.8%) participated more willingly in physical activities compared to initial sessions.

What stood out to us most wasn't just that the numbers went up. It's that they went up the most for the activities kids actually seemed to enjoy. Dance and rhythm-based exercises consistently got the highest engagement, and that taught us something we didn't really expect going in: how much a kid is enjoying themselves might matter just as much as how the exercise itself is designed. A child who's having fun keeps showing up, and showing up is half the battle.

We also noticed that different groups responded to different things. Balance and posture-focused activities seemed to work particularly well for children with Down syndrome, while the structured, visually guided format of the app connected especially well with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. We didn't set out to prove this, but it came through clearly enough in the observations that we think it's worth pointing out. It suggests that a single approach to movement apps probably isn't right for neurodiverse users, and that flexibility needs to be part of the design from the start, not something added on later.

Basically, GroovAbility seems to work not because it forces kids to exercise, but because it makes movement feel doable and rewarding. Putting together visual demonstrations, structured routines, gamification, and personalized recommendations gave kids something they actually wanted to be part of, and that, more than any single number, feels like the real takeaway from this pilot.

That said, we want to be upfront about the limits of what we're claiming here. This was a small group, a short time frame, and the improvements we're reporting come from what educators and caregivers observed, not standardized clinical testing. We're not saying GroovAbility is a clinical tool, and it was never meant to replace professional therapy. What we can say is that it points somewhere promising, and that's worth exploring further with more children, more time, and better measurement tools than we had for this pilot.

If this project taught us anything, it's that designing for inclusion isn't about making a simpler version of an existing tool. It's about rethinking what "accessible" actually means for the people using it. GroovAbility is a small step in that direction, and we think it's one worth building on.

Inference:

During the three-week pilot study, GroovAbility demonstrated promising potential as a tool for increasing physical activity and engagement among neurodiverse children. While the testing period was relatively short and no formal clinical measurements were conducted, educators and caregivers consistently observed improvements in participation, confidence, coordination, and balance. Dance and rhythm-based exercises were particularly effective in maintaining engagement across all participant groups, while balance and posture activities appeared especially beneficial for children with Down syndrome. Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder responded positively to the structured, visually guided exercise format, and many showed improved willingness to participate in physical activities over time. The findings suggest that combining visual demonstrations, gamification, and syndrome-sensitive exercise recommendations can encourage regular movement and support the development of motor skills in neurodiverse children. However, longer-term testing with larger participant groups and objective fitness measurements would be necessary to fully evaluate the app's long-term effectiveness and physical impact.

GroovAbility demonstrates how inclusive technology, grounded in behavioral science and child development research, can enhance physical wellness for neurodiverse children. By addressing overstimulation, lack of personalized guidance, and privacy concerns, the app creates a safe, structured, and motivating pathway for consistent exercise.

The combination of adaptive GIF-based demonstrations, sensory-friendly visuals, and offline data protection makes GroovAbility both accessible and child-centered. Its approach aligns with global goals for inclusive education, digital safety, and responsible technology for vulnerable groups.

Future improvements may include offline personalization through device-level learning, multisensory feedback, motion tracking and collaborations with physiotherapists to expand the exercise library. With continued interdisciplinary development, GroovAbility can grow from a fitness app into a scalable framework for inclusive health innovation - empowering every child to move, grow, and thrive in their own way.

16. Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to everyone who guided and supported me throughout the development of Groovability.

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