

# Social Signs

Amber Warren, sign language teacher at Tompkins High School, connects Katy's deaf community through a social group

Written by Holly Leger | Select photography by Alyncia Dennis

Amber Warren was waiting for class to start when she caught her first glimpse of sign language. Then a sophomore at Clear Lake High School, Warren had no experience with the language. Her basketball teammates, however, were taking an American Sign Language (ASL) class. Warren would chat with them in the hallway during the passing period.

"One of my classes was just down the hall from theirs," Warren recalls. "I would stand and talk with them until the late bell was about to ring, and then I'd run to class."

Her teammates shared a class with the one deaf student who was mainstreamed at the high school. One day while Warren was in the hallway with her friends, she noticed a student signing with someone. Warren watched them communicate with intrigue. "I was like, 'I have to do that,'" Warren says. Little did she know just how much that one encounter would inspire her for the rest of her life.

## Learning and Teaching ASL

Eventually Warren introduced herself to the girl she'd seen signing, and soon, the two became friends. Warren stayed after school with her each day learning how to sign. Warren knew the alphabet in ASL, so she would spell a word out to the girl, and then ask, "How sign?" "That's the way it went for the longest time," Warren says. "She was very patient with me." The young friendship left a lasting impression on Warren and her view of the deaf community.

Now, a full-time ASL teacher at Tompkins High School, Warren says one of her favorite things about teaching is seeing the progress of her students. However, she likes to remind them that true progress in a language is found outside the classroom.

## Networking Through Social Media

With her students in mind, along with her passion for the deaf community, Warren wanted to create an event that would allow deaf and hearing people to come together and learn from each other. The only problem was Warren didn't know any deaf people living in Katy. So she reached out to one of her deaf friends who leads a social in Sugar Land.

He recommended Deaf Network, a networking social website. Soon Warren began posting her events on the website and sending out Facebook invitations. With a little help from

her friends in Sugar Land, word of the Katy Deaf Social got around. The group now meets the first Friday of every month at Katy Mills Mall.

## Circle of Friends

Warren says people of all ages and proficiencies attend the socials, so newcomers shouldn't feel nervous. In fact, Warren and other ASL teachers in Katy ISD encourage their high school students to attend in order to grow in their



Members of the Katy Deaf Social spell out the word "Katy" in sign language

*“I think if you’re able  
to go to the social,  
you’ll see how strong  
the community is,  
how connected  
they are.”*

*- Amber Warren*



Amber Warren encourages her students and others interested in sign language to meet with the Katy Deaf Social

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The Katy Deaf Social meets monthly at Katy Mills Mall

Photo courtesy of Karen Hall



Christina Chapa is a student at Lone Star College and is in the process of learning American Sign Language

understanding of the language. “Those who go to the social really excel,” she says.

Greg and Suesette Olson, both deaf, found the social posted on Deaf Network. Greg Olson and his wife enjoy interacting with the students, at the high school and college level, because it gives them a chance to educate others about signing and the deaf community.

“This is our way of paying it forward - giving students an opportunity to practice their new language skills outside of the classroom,” Greg says.

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The socials are more than just an educational experience, though. For some, it is a place to meet new people and build friendships. Christina Chapa, a student studying to be a deaf interpreter at Lone Star College-CyFair, attends the socials for just that - the social aspect.

“It’s funny how I’ve only been twice, but I feel like I’ve known that group of people for much, much longer,” Chapa says. “These socials remind me that my world doesn’t revolve around noise or sound. It’s about the people.”

For Warren, the best part is simply getting to sign and be with people who care about education and the deaf community like she does. “I think if you’re able to go to the social, you’ll see how strong the community is, how connected they are.” KM

*HOLLY LEGER is a freelance writer who always thought ASL was interesting, but thinks even higher of it now after meeting the people who use it.*

*Search “Katy Deaf Social” on Facebook and join them the first Friday of the month at Katy Mills Mall from 5 to 9 p.m.  
Email [amberwarren@katyisd.org](mailto:amberwarren@katyisd.org).*



Warren invites newcomers to the social group for both the educational experience and the friendship

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