

Ohio artist changing lives before you've even heard of him

Twenty-four-year-old hip-hop artist SFE Tav plans to put his newfound success back into his hometown of Dayton, Ohio.

SFE Tav, whose real name is Tavien Williams, is a genre-bending hip-hop artist from Dayton, Ohio who has made waves over the past few years. Williams, who began releasing music in 2019, has an established following on social media and streaming platforms with over 25,000 monthly Spotify listeners and over 30,000 Instagram followers. Friends and family could never have predicted this kind of success, but the signs were there.

From constantly learning new songs on the instruments that he took home from band class in school to making songs on his phone for fun, Williams was noticeably musically inclined at an early age. He was also gifted at sports, specifically basketball, but even as he made a name for himself on the court entering college, it never spoke to him the same way music did.

“Sports were handed to me, but music was the only thing I chose for myself,” said Williams, who dropped out of college once his music career truly took off.

Dayton residents had good things to say when it came to the young artist. “I feel like the city was surprised, but not in a way where they didn't like his music...in a way where we're actively watching somebody progress...a real come-up story. Well-received and liked, for sure,” said fellow Dayton artist Kohl Bryant, a friend of Williams'.

Others who have collaborated with him outside of music have expressed similar sentiments, such as those at the small Dayton-based fitness supplement business FitFam. “What Tav cares about most is making sure other people feel welcomed around him,” said owner Famal Shakhmandarov.

Outside of Dayton, listeners from all over the world have discovered his music. Williams is using his fast-growing platform to spread positive messages of understanding and acceptance regarding mental health issues that many teenagers and young adults face every day, including social isolation, self-esteem, and navigating love. Diagnosed with clinical depression at a young age, the artist places a heavy emphasis on the importance of mental health and, more specifically, suicide prevention.

“The internet takes everything as a joke, but people genuinely need help. A lot of people are scared to be themselves and scared to be open about it, and instead they just get overwhelmed,” said Williams.

In addition to the personal connection he has with fans through the music, he also offers advice through direct messages on Instagram and is active in a group chat he created for people to interact, make friends, and express their feelings freely. “I think it’s so simple and easy for there to be a platform for people to reach each other when they need one another. It doesn’t take much,” said the artist.

Williams also spoke on how he would like to contribute to solving Dayton’s homelessness problem in the future. The situation becomes even more dire around this time of the year as temperatures begin to drop. According to Dayton Public Schools, over 400 students identified as homeless in January. In 2023, Montgomery County, Ohio reported almost 800 homeless individuals, a record for the area. Williams, however, has plans to help prevent families in poverty from reaching similar levels of crisis in the future.

The SFE Relief Fund is a financial assistance program where people in the city of Dayton, Ohio can apply for aid to help avoid evictions, vehicle impoundment, and other

emergencies families are often faced with. Shine For Eternity, Williams' LLC, will fund the charitable program. He hopes it will act as a lifeline for those who need it. "A lot of people just need the resources to start, and they can take it from there," said Williams.

Where does an artist like Williams get such a philanthropic attitude from? According to his sister, Briana Williams, it started early. "He was a nice kid. He was actually selected in elementary school to partner with a kid who was overweight. Tav jogged a mile with him every day," she said.

When asked what inspired his philanthropy, Williams attributed it to his father. "He does a lot and doesn't get a lot in return, but he still keeps giving. There's not really a downside to it if you do it correctly," he said.

Today, Williams' biggest song has over 3 million total streams. He has even managed to host an annual show in Dayton that many passionate fans travel from out of state to attend. This past October's show was sold-out, with well over 200 attendees.

As SFE Tav's career continues to grow, the goal to help people within and outside of his city remains at the forefront for him. Creating equal opportunities for everyone allows them to pursue their passions much like he was able to, and perhaps even change the world in the process. As Williams puts it, "you never know who is going to become what."