Social work professor and Lincy Institute Scholar Ramona Denby-Brinson uses research as a tool to help children who have entered the child welfare, mental health, and juvenile justice systems.

Ramona Denby-Brinson remembers the day she decided to pursue a career in academia.

A medical social worker at the time, she walked into the emergency room at University Medical Center to see the familiar face of a young boy; she had worked to find services for him three times already that year.

She regretted that she would need to call the child protective services hotline about him – a decision she always dreaded, given the impact of child removal on both the child and the family.

“I said, ‘Whatever we are doing is not working. In a few months, he’ll be back,’” she recalls, realizing then that life for children like this young patient and many others like him was not changing. She knew she had to take a different approach.

Her time as a frontline social worker often made her wonder what more she and her colleagues could and should do and how to impact larger systemic issues so that children and families do not re-enter the social service system.

“A lot of the problems that people face are larger than the individual,” she says. “How do we get at the root cause and to a solution? The question is, what interventions really work?”

As much as she loved working directly with clients, she knew she wouldn’t find the necessary policy and program answers as a frontline social worker – only more questions. It was at that point she decided then to pursue a doctorate and later a career as a researcher and professor.

That decision eventually led her to UNLV, where she now serves as a senior resident scholar at The Lincy Institute and as a professor in the School of Social Work.

In this role, she conducts research on how social services are provided to the most vulnerable children and their families: those who have entered the child welfare, mental health, and juvenile justice systems.

She has been awarded $10.5 million in nationally competitive research grants since 1996 from such agencies as the National Institutes of Health, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the Lois and Samuel Silberman Foundation. She has published multiple peer-reviewed articles, books, book chapters, policy briefs, and technical reports; her work has also been disseminated and diffused nationally and internationally via numerous conferences, at which she has served both as an invited speaker and peer-reviewed presenter.

While her scholarly success is certainly note-
worthy, Denby-Brinson also counts her ac-
complishments in terms of the number of people her research has helped. She would be the first to say that she conducts research on a mission to help people and to make a difference in their lives.

In one of her empirical studies, she and her research team collaborated with a host of child welfare providers to increase child well-being by supporting the relative caregivers who assume responsibility for them. The findings of this study revealed that Clark County’s foster care population is twice the percentage of the nation’s foster care population placed with relatives as opposed to the national average of 4 to 6 percent. The study examined the impact of placement on children in foster care and found that children who were placed in relative settings were more likely to have a stable family environment and less likely to be re-abused than those placed in nonrelative settings. The study concluded that family stability and kinship care are crucial factors in the well-being of children in foster care.

Denby-Brinson is a strong advocate for evidence-based practice, and she believes that the only way to ensure that children and families receive the best possible care is through rigorous research and evaluation. In her work, she strives to balance the need for immediate services with the importance of conducting high-quality research. She is passionate about ensuring that children and families receive the best possible care, and she believes that this can only be achieved through a combination of strong policy and effective research.

Denby-Brinson’s research not only impacts children and families, but it also helps to shape the future of social work. Her work has contributed to the development of evidence-based practices and has helped to improve the outcomes for children and families in foster care. She is committed to ensuring that children and families receive the best possible care, and she will continue to work tirelessly to advance this goal.

Denby-Brinson is a true voice for children and families, and she will continue to be a leader in the field of social work. Her dedication to improving the lives of children and families is unwavering, and she will continue to strive for the best possible outcomes for all children and families. 

Denby-Brinson’s work is driven by her belief in the power of evidence-based practice and her commitment to ensuring that children and families receive the best possible care. She is dedicated to improving the outcomes for children and families in foster care, and she will continue to work tirelessly to achieve this goal.